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ABSTRACT

This document is comprised of the six issues in volume 17 of the Harvard Education Letter, a bimonthly newsletter addressing current issues in elementary and secondary education. Articles in this volume include the following: (1) January-February--"Charters and Districts: Three Stages in an Often Rocky Relationship" (Kelly) and "'We Don't Allow That Here'" (Pirozzi); (2) March-April--"The New Face of Homeschooling" (Farber) and "Collateral Damage" (Birk) on high stakes testing; (3) May-June--"Closing the Gap One School at a Time" (Sadowski) and "Teachers Helping Teachers" (Kelly); (4) July-August--"Seeking a Cure for Senior-Year Slump" (Kelly) and "Nuts and Bolts of Charter-Business Partnerships" (Kelly); (5) September-October--"Sexual Minority Students Benefit from School-Based Support--Where It Exists" (Sadowski) and "So_ving Problems with 'Action Research'"; and (6) November-December--"Teaching Civics after September 11" (Gordon) and "Making Global Connections." Regular features include editorial statements and summaries of recent research. (KB)

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David T. Gordon, Editor

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Charters and Districts: Three Stages in an Often Rocky Relationship

Although public charter and district-run schools are pitted against each other, many find they can better serve kids' needs through cooperation

By Karen Kelly

For years, life in the Worcester, MA, public school district was relatively calm—not much turnover in the administration and not much change in the schools. Then came the charters. The Edison Project got there first, in 1996, with its Seven Hills Charter School. The Advantage Schools opened a K–7 school of its own. By 2000, more than 1,100 students had left district schools for charters—and $7,500 of state funding followed each of them, for a total of more than $8 million.

Worcester school superintendent James Caradonio still seethes at the development, treating the influx of charters like the coming of a plague. "These are snake oil salesmen," he remembers thinking when he first met Edison representatives. "They went across the country, stole things developed by public schools, and put them in a Whitman sampler box. They're good businesspeople, but even the Bible says you can't serve both God and mammon—and they prove it every damn day."

"We have to identify why people are leaving," says one district superintendent.

Caradonio's reaction is not unusual among school district administrators who see their enrollments and budgets reduced by these newcomers. In the nearly 40 states where charter schools have opened, administrators' responses have ranged from open hostility to quiet obstruction to cautious welcome. Convinced that charters undermine the mission of public education, many district leaders have attacked them in the media, used legal action to stop their progress, and even threatened to discipline teachers who make contact with charters.

Yet in many districts, the chilly reception of charters may be warming. In Worcester, Seven Hills principal Robert Martin says that since he took his position in 1999 he has seen hostilities wane, if only by degrees: "My predecessor went to meetings where [district administrators] were rude and hostile. Since I arrived, I wouldn't characterize their reaction as positive—but it's certainly polite."

Worcester may be following a predictable pattern, according to Eric Rofes, professor of education at Humboldt State University in Arcata, CA. Rofes says his research—which spans seven years and more than 25 urban, rural, and suburban districts in eight states—shows that districts typically go through three stages of response to charters. First, there's a period in which school districts try to prevent or obstruct the birth and growth of charters. (Rofes acknowledges that districts such as Cleveland, OH, and Springfield, MA, have welcomed charters as a means to expedite reforms, but those are few and far between.) However, as the charters take root, district administrators move to stage two: they implement changes designed to compete with the charters for students. In the third stage, as charters become a fixture, a certain "equilibrium and mutual respect" is achieved, says Rofe, though he adds that it can often feel like the uneasy peace of a demilitarized zone.

Rofes first noticed these three stages while conducting a survey in 1998 as part of his doctoral studies at the University of California at Berkeley. "I would often visit districts for a quick window of time and then hear very

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The Research Feature
This month's focus is on anti-violence programs, with online links and other resources.

The Forum Feature
Marion Diamond, professor of integrative biology at UC-Berkeley, discusses how enriched and impoverished experiential environments affect brain development.

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little from them for a couple of years," says Rofes. "Then I'd go back. People would forget what they had told me. I'd find myself saying, 'The last time I was here, you were really scared about the charter school,' and they'd say, 'Was I really?'"

Stage One: Hostility

In many states, stage one—the hostile stage—begins the day charter school legislation is proposed. Such tensions are the natural result of free-market competition for public school students, arousing "the kind of mutual suspicions and jealousies that often arise among competitors," says Michigan State University researcher Michael Mintrom, who studied more than 100 charter schools in his state.

The fiery rhetoric and sometimes exaggerated claims of charter advocates and opponents further heat the political atmosphere and torpedo later efforts at cooperation between charters and traditional schools. Minton notes that some Michigan charter advocates argued that "school districts and the Michigan Department of Education represent road blocks to quality schooling." Rofes found similar examples: "Charter schools that had recruited families and increased their own stature by criticizing, demeaning, or outright trashing the local traditional public schools frequently found themselves unable to create comfortable working relationships to share pedagogical insights or oversee student transitions in and out of the charter school."

In some districts, administrators have been accused of actively trying to undermine new charter schools. For instance, education researcher Tom Loveless of the Brookings Institution, writing in *Educational Administration Quarterly*, cites a Massachusetts district that thwarted one charter's opening by outbidding it for rooms it was hoping to lease from a local synagogue. The district got the lease, even though its population hadn't changed in years, and the charter school couldn't find other affordable space in time to open for the new school year.

A 1999 study by Jeffrey Henig, a political science professor at George Washington University, reported that District of Columbia school administrators used their control of vacant school buildings to obstruct new charters. According to Henig, the law gives DC charter schools preference in buying vacant buildings owned by the city school district. But Henig found several examples of buildings that were "suddenly unavailable" when charters expressed interest. The public school board had to reject 15 charter applications in 1998 because the applicants had not yet found buildings.

"The charters feel any delay is a deliberate attempt to squelch them," says Henig. "But the district would argue that those are buildings they have a responsibility to sell for the highest return so they have to move slower than the charters would like." (DC administrators refused *HEL*'s request for an interview.)

The money school districts lose when a student transfers to a charter is probably the greatest reason for tensions, especially

The supposed financial threat charters pose to school districts may be largely unfounded.

in states like New York, where districts have to make up the losses on their own.

For instance, Albany district superintendent Lonnie Palmer blames the opening of the New Covenant Charter School in 1999 for creating daunting financial pressures on Albany schools and higher taxes for citizens. He says that because the charter was approved one month after the district had passed its budget, the funding needed for extra buses, textbooks, special education, and Title I programs wasn't available. "If we had a year to plan together and if the state funding formula made sense, [the reception of the charter school] would have been more amicable," says Palmer. "We needed more time to process things."

While fear of financial difficulties contributes to the animosity expressed by many school administrators, a recent study suggests that those concerns may be largely unfounded. Researchers from the State University of New York at Stony Brook interviewed both school district and charter school leaders in Massachusetts, New Jersey, and the District of Columbia. The report, released last June by the Manhattan Institute, a New York–based think tank, showed that "districts and their individual schools have to date been shielded from most of the costs of losing students to charter schools."

The researchers attribute this in part to the financial support state governments offer districts that lose students to charters. The rising population of students from the "baby boom echo" has helped soften the blow, too, as has immigration: the influx of new students has often offset the number of those who have left.

Eric Rofes uncovered similar trends in his report. Of the 25 districts Rofes surveyed, 14 experienced no significant financial losses, as measured by comparing the district's budget before the charter school opened to its budget the year after. Among those that did lose money, only five reported significant shortfalls, usually because of their small size. One Arizona superintendent he interviewed was so swamped with new students that he expressed relief when charter schools began "siphoning" them off.

Stage Two: Districts Respond

In the second stage in Rofes's model, districts scramble to find ways to bring back students who have gone to charters. Many have developed schools and curricula that directly compete with what the charters have to offer. For instance, in Boston, the public school district opened nine reform-oriented pilot schools in 1995, the same year that charters were introduced. In Mesa, AZ, administrators opened a "back to basics" magnet school to compete with several charters that had lured students away with a similar curriculum. Lansing, MI, added full-day kindergartens and Williamsburg, MA, added an after-school program.

In a 1998–1999 study, University of Virginia researchers Frederick Hess and Robert Maranto and James Madison University professor Scott Milliman found that the Mesa and Queen Creek, AZ, districts responded to public demand by requiring phonics training for their teachers. More than one-third of the students who had left for charters returned to Queen Creek when the district started emphasizing phonics, the study showed.

In Flagstaff, AZ, district superintendent Larry Bramblett says he's not ashamed to admit that his district has borrowed ideas from neighboring charters.

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Editor's Note

Since 1992, more than 2,000 charter schools have opened in 36 states and the District of Columbia, usually sparking intense debate. Proponents may promise innovative teaching and learning, better performance and accountability, less bureaucracy, and more satisfied teachers. Opponents may claim that charters undermine traditional schools by stealing the best students, shirking their responsibilities to special-needs students, and letting for-profit foxes into the public school henhouse. Yet charter schools defy generalizations.

We know this much: charter schools are public schools of choice that are free of some of the restrictions under which traditional public schools operate. We also know they are very likely here to stay. But almost any other statement has to begin, "It depends..." Are curricula and instruction in charter schools more innovative? Depends who's running them. What rules and obligations govern charters? Depends what state they're in. Are parents, students, teachers, and administrators happier? Are charters more accountable? It depends... As one researcher recently put it, asking what happens in a charter school is like asking what happens in a big or small school building: It all depends on who's inside and what their aims and practices are.

"Charters and Districts: Three Stages in an Often Rocky Relationship" marks the first in an occasional series on charter schools. In keeping with our mission as a bridge between research and practice, *HEL* will be looking to find in the charter experiment benefits from which all K–12 schools can profit.

— David T. Gordon

For instance, he has reduced the student-teacher ratio to 20:1 in kindergarten through 3rd grade and he hopes to get to 24:1 in the other grades. The district has also increased enrollment in Advanced Placement courses and opened magnet schools. "We have to identify why people are leaving and what we can do to draw them back," he says. "Districts can deny that or embrace it. In our case, I'd like to bring some of the charters back into the district."

Public relations and marketing also take on new importance in many districts, according to Rofes. For example, Grand Rapids, MI, began offering training in PR and marketing to its school administrators, and the district paid to produce and air television ads to promote itself. In Holland, MI, the school district hired a full-time communications director and sent letters to parents, asking for feedback and encouraging them to re-enroll their children in district schools. The Flagstaff district purchased ads in local newspapers comparing its expenditures and test scores with neighboring schools.

Stage Three: Equilibrium

The third stage of Rofes's model finds a shift in attitude toward charter schools by school district leaders, one that suggests that a period of mutual respect and perhaps even cooperation may be possible. At the same time, charter leaders temper their criticism of district schools and, perhaps, overblown expectations of their own schools' performance.

Writes Rofes: "Claims predicting the devastation of the school system [have] been proven to be exaggerations, and charters [have] passed the honeymoon period when they were idealistically characterized. ... An odd kind of symbiotic relationships appears to emerge, where districts realize some kids are better off in the charter and not in the district. District folks and charter folks [become] clear on what the district's got going for it and what the charter's got going for it."

Flagstaff superintendent Bramblett says in the two years since he took over, he has been comfortable cooperating with the 12 charter schools in his district. "When I came here, there was a great deal of fear and trepidation," says Bramblett, who previously served as an administrator in Peterborough, NH. "I don't have that. I think public education needs a shot of adrenaline and I believe charters will help us get better."

In particular, Bramblett has been courting the Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy, a charter high school started by a former Arizona Teacher of the Year, Karen Butterfield. A district teacher for 22 years, Butterfield first presented her idea for an arts and service learning academy to the school district, which can grant charters. When they turned her down, she sought approval from another chartering agency, and won.

Five years later, Butterfield runs a school for 160 students located on the campus of the Museum of Northern Arizona. She also has a vibrant relationship with the district. "As soon as [Bramblett] was appointed, I went with a letter explaining the challenges we had faced in the past and that we were committed to an open-door policy with the school," says Butterfield. "He was very responsive and asked what he could do to bring us back into the district."

Butterfield says she's not ready to give up the autonomy she enjoys as principal of a charter school, but she has taken advantage of Bramblett's offer to collaborate with the district. The charter has opened some of its classes to district students, while charter students are taking the district's AP courses. There's also a unified theater project with other high schools that's supported by a dissemination grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The relationship has progressed to the point where Karen Butterfield can call district principals at any hour to ask questions or swap information about transfer students. "We're on the best terms with Flagstaff Unified that we've been in five years," says Butterfield.

Bramblett agrees. Five years after Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy opened, district administrators have accepted that charters are here to stay. Questions such as "What will happen to me if the charter schools get really good? Won't a lot of kids leave and won't that mean that I won't have a job?" are no longer a concern. Instead, teachers in Flagstaff's district schools and charters are focused on improving education for students. Sometimes that means working together. "We're starting to see a change away from the more defensive position to a proactive one," he says. "After all, isn't the issue really about making sure we educate all kids?" ■

Karen Kelly is an education writer based in Ottawa and a regular contributor to the Harvard Education Letter.

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"We Don't Allow That Here"

In an effort to stem student violence, schools experiment with ways to improve school safety and promote tolerance without resorting to draconian measures

By Karen Pirozzi

The shootings at Columbine High School in April 1999 focused national attention on the problem of school violence and sent many districts scrambling for ways to upgrade their school safety programs. The Cherry Creek District in Englewood, CO, already had a set of strategies to promote school safety that included its own anti-bullying program, which has become a national model. In the aftermath of Columbine, Cherry Creek school psychologist Larry Epstein heard one of his elementary school students saying, "What happened at Columbine couldn't happen here, because everyone has a friend." To Epstein, that student's perception of security—and her indirect reference to the school's effort to build caring relationships—was the best endorsement the Cherry Creek program could have.

At a time when many schools have answered concerns about school violence with metal detectors and zero-tolerance policies, most experts agree that, although get-tough measures are sometimes warranted, the best approach to dealing with violence is the kind Cherry Creek is taking: to promote mental health and solid skills—academic and social—and to provide early intervention for students who are struggling in those areas.

Media coverage of tragedies like Columbine leaves the false impression that schools are becoming killing grounds. In fact, homicides on school property are rare, accounting for less than one percent of children's deaths, according to the U.S. Department of Education's 1999 Report on School Safety. Still, violence of a lesser degree has become nearly commonplace. According to the 2000 National Study of School Environment and Problem Behavior funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, 32 percent of highschoolers and 41 percent of middle school students admitted to hitting or threatening to hit another student in the previous year. In middle schools, 19 percent of students said they had been victims of physical attacks that year, while 10 percent of high school students reported the same.

What can schools do? Researchers from the Hamilton Fish Institute of School and Community Violence, located at George Washington University and funded primarily by the U.S. Department of Justice, reviewed some 900 studies of school violence-prevention programs to determine which had the most positive impact on student behavior. The dozen most successful programs shared several characteristics, says Hamilton Fish researcher Paul Kingery. In general, they

- take place over time, rather than in a few short lessons, so that they're integrated into school life;

Since bullying can take the form of exclusion, schools should address the impact of cliques.

- take place in workshop rather than lecture format so that students can learn with and teach each other, perhaps with culturally relevant music and images;
- focus on teaching specific skills, such as diffusing an argument or expressing angry feelings with words, and provide students the opportunity to practice those skills;
- give students feedback from adults and peers on their performance.

The following curricula are examples of antiviolence programs. They offer a variety of strategies: one aims to eliminate bullying behavior, one focuses on conflict resolution, and a third targets at-risk kindergarten students for early intervention.

Bully-Proofing Your School

Bully-Proofing Your School, developed by the Cherry Creek School District, is a prevention tool that aims to enhance overall school climate and provide students with specific skills to stand up to bullies. The program, which was featured at last year's American Psychological Association convention, focuses on the large majority of students who are neither bullies nor victims but who, with guidance, can become a "caring majority" that asserts itself, says Cherry Creek's director of student achievement, Bill Porter. Students learn to support victims of bullying and to care about others by including them in friendships and activities. In doing so, this caring majority strips a small minority of bullies of its power to intimidate.

Bully-proofing is now required for all students in grades K–8. Students get five to eight classroom lessons from mental-health professionals or teachers that give victims or witnesses of bullying strategies for action; the lessons vary according to developmental level. The program also includes training for all staff in how to respond to reports of bullying.

With younger children, facilitators focus on defining bullying and on the difference between tattling and telling. "That's scary for kids," says Larry Epstein. "They think they'll be bullied if they tell. But we're creating an environment where it's okay to tell. It's their responsibility." Students also learn a mnemonic—HA HA SO—to help remember the bully-proofing principles: *Help, Assert yourself; Humor, Avoid; and Self-talk, Own it.* Posters around the school remind them of these methods.

Older students practice ways of confronting bullies peacefully, saying things like, "We don't allow that in our school." They are encouraged to seek adult help, for themselves or for others, when bullying takes place, and they are taught to include all students in school activities.

Since bullying can take the form of exclusion, not just intimidation, any good program should address the impact of cliques, says Beth Doll, associate professor of school psychology at the University

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of Nebraska at Lincoln. "[Exclusion is] the second dimension of school violence. Kids need to feel like part of the community." At Cherry Creek, Bully-Proofing Your School helps break up exclusive cliques. "We talked in classroom groups about how cliques derive their power from excluding others and [about] what we really want in friends," says Epstein. "I've seen some girls, particularly those who tended to be perpetually on the fringes of the group, start to make other choices about friendships."

Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways

Teaching students conflict-resolution skills in school is another way to address the risk of violence. In Richmond, VA, high school principal Howard Hopkins says his district's program, Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways (RIPP), has improved the school climate: "We have fewer discipline referrals, fewer fights. Recently, I was able to leave two students who wanted to fight alone in my office. I told them I'd be back in 15

Violent Students: Reading the Warning Signs

By Karen Pirozzi

Not every child will respond to school-wide violence-prevention efforts, and few can be expected to appear at a principal's office door asking for help. In fact, how schools should identify troubled students and whether and how to intervene is the subject of some controversy. The U.S. Department of Education, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Secret Service, and the American Psychological Association have all released lists of "warning signs" or reports on characteristics common to violent offenders.

Do such lists encourage so-called profiling that will lead to unfair labeling and stigmatizing of students? Not if they're used with discretion and sensitivity, say experts. "If a teacher is concerned about a kid's behavior or writing and calls the police, who then come and arrest the kid, that's different than when the concern is brought to a group of mental health professionals who interview the kid and find out what's going on and discuss how to help," says Kevin Dwyer, lead investigator for the Department of Education's "Early Warning, Timely Response" and "Safeguarding Our Schools" guides. He notes that the list of warning signs in "Early Warning" make clear that items on the list—such as social withdrawal, excessive feelings of rejection, uncontrolled anger, and a history of discipline problems—should not be presumed to predict violent behavior, but merely used "as an aid to identifying and referring children who may need help." Although this list has been used in court to support a student's expulsion from school, "This was certainly not intended," he says.

Bill Modzeleski, director of the DOE's Safe and Drug Free Schools program, agrees with Dwyer in rejecting facile use of checklists to label or rule out children as potentially violent. He says schools must be particularly cautious when a commercial enterprise tries to sell them software or other services designed to "predict" violent behavior. "There's just no way we can profile kids and figure out who's the next shooter," he adds.

Joe Harpold, a supervising special agent in the FBI's Behavioral Sciences Unit, jokes that the unit might more accurately be considered the "Behavioral Arts Unit," since human behavior defies scientific prediction. For that reason, the FBI does not recommend profiling potentially violent students. Profiling, he says, is a specific law enforcement tool that is not meant for use in schools. Rather, the FBI's list of traits is simply a list of warning signs. "If a child has any of these traits, he may need help to stop hurting," says Harpold. "We need programs to provide support these kids aren't getting elsewhere."

The Cherry Creek School District in Colorado uses the "Early Warning" list of signs to spot students in need of assistance rather than as a predictor of violence, according to school psychologist Linda Kanan. The district emphasizes a team approach to assess student need. A group of adults, including the child's parents, comes together to decide whether the child needs help and to develop a plan for obtaining it.

The same team (consisting of an administrator, a dean of students, counselors, a special education representative, a school nurse, and a school psychologist or social worker) meets to examine and address concerns specific to individual students—whether academic, social, behavioral, or emotional. It gathers facts, assesses the student's mental status, reviews the child's background, and tries to determine the function a particular antisocial behavior serves for the student. "We might need to look very closely at the behavior, when and where it occurs and what leads to the behavior of concern, in order to decide on appropriate interventions for that student or situation," says Kanan.

Parental input can provide potent clues. For example, disclosure of a family illness, domestic violence, a move, or a pending divorce can shed light on the student's behavior, where it might lead, and how the school might provide support. In turn, team members try to assist parents with suggestions for how to address the child's needs at home and in the community.

When a student exhibits warning signs for potentially violent behavior, she says, "the intensity of the intervention must match the severity of the needs." That might range from simply telling the student his behavior is "not okay," to connecting the student to a caring adult in the school, to referring the student to an outside mental health agency. ■

minutes and would let them resolve it themselves. They did. I'm not sure I would have left them alone before we had RIPP in place."

The Richmond schools developed RIPP in 1991 together with city behavioral-health officials and researchers from Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). Recent research, funded in part by the federal Centers for Disease Control, shows that 6th-grade RIPP participants in three of the city's middle schools had lower rates of disciplinary referrals for violent offenses and lower overall rates of in-school suspensions than students in the no-treatment control group, according to project director Albert Farrell of VCU.

Classroom sessions teach children approaches to avoiding violence. These include not only techniques for resolving conflict, but also ways to assess when it makes more sense and is safer to avoid, ignore, or diffuse conflict. "There are a lot of situations in these kids' lives where it could be a bad idea for them to try to talk it out," says Aleta Meyer, project codirector and assistant professor of psychology at VCU. "We have to teach kids that there are a lot of options. Having more options makes them more powerful."

Senior violence-prevention specialist Christopher Moore says he and other program facilitators spend about 45 minutes each week in 6th-grade classrooms. During that time, the students practice their skills with role-play, work together in groups, and discuss alternatives for real-life situations they've faced.

In addition to in-class instruction, Moore runs a peer-mediation program for older students in which students learn to act as neutral, third-party arbiters in disputes, and he makes himself available for one-on-one counseling and discussion with students.

First Step to Success

While conflict-resolution education works best when aimed at all students, the First Step to Success program—one of those cited by the Hamilton Fish Institute as especially effective—targets individual kindergarten students showing early signs of antisocial behavior. "The overall goal of First Step is to help at-risk children get off to the best possible start in school and to keep them from taking an antisocial path in their school careers and lives," says program developer Hill Walker, co-director of the Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior at the University of Oregon. Formal program evaluations showed effective and lasting improvements in both behavior and social adjustment, notes Walker. Students' aggressive and maladaptive behavior decreased, while adaptive behavior and academically engaged time increased.

Consider the case of Tyler. From his first days in kindergarten at Little Axe Elementary School in Norman, OK, he stood out. He seemed to bounce "like a pinball" from one activity to the next, unable to focus, recalls teacher Mary Callies: "He was real sweet. He'd jump up to help someone else with their work, but he wouldn't get his own done." In another school, Tyler's behavior might have led straight to an ADHD diagnosis. But a class-wide screening at Little Axe found he was a good candidate for the First Step intervention.

Home sessions encourage parents to "share school" with their kids.

This highly structured program involves the teacher, parents, and a coordinator—often a counselor or school psychologist—and targets one child at a time for a period of about three months. After a screening process, the coordinator approaches the child's parents first and tells them it looks like their child could use help getting off to the right start in school. Most parents give their consent, and about 75 percent of parents participate in the in-home component. At school, the coordinator provides one-on-one feedback and support to the child. Later, the teacher takes over, telling the child by way of a red or green card whether his or her behavior should stop or continue. The child receives frequent feedback and positive reinforcement on a strict schedule. In addition, the child earns points toward special rewards at school and home through classroom activities and games in which other children help the child succeed for the benefit of the whole class.

The home sessions "teach parents skills under the rubric of teaching their child school success," says Walker, which encourages parents to "share school" with their kids. These sessions help parents communicate with their children about school, build their confidence, set appropriate limits, and teach cooperation, problem-solving, and friendship skills. The program coordinator provides parents with activity cards that suggest five-minute games to play with their children each night in support of the lessons. When children's parents won't participate (usually, they say, because of time constraints) or can't (because of illiteracy, language barriers, or personal problems), schools find "surrogates" at school who can play the parent's role with the child, according to Annemieke Golly, First Step to Success project director.

"I think the program is pretty wonderful," says Little Axe teacher Callies. "As we went along it got to where Tyler could finish his work and listen to a story without poking those around him." Best of all, she adds, other children's behavior improved as well. "I realized that because I was giving Tyler so much positive feedback all the time, I also gave more to other children. Overall, I think it was a happier classroom because of First Step."

Choosing a Program

Bully-Proofing Your School, Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways, and First Step to Success are among the dozens of programs schools might choose as part of a comprehensive safe-school effort. In order to find programs with good track records that match school and community needs, administrators should undergo a "needs-assessment process," says Carlos Sundermann, program director of the National Resource Center for Safe Schools.

Anonymous student surveys are one way to jump-start the needs-assessment process, he says. Surveys, such as the one available on the Hamilton Fish Institute's website, provide violent-incident reports as well as information about students' attitudes and coping mechanisms—potentially helpful clues as to which solution

For Further Information

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might work best. For example, if student surveys reveal a high incidence of physical fighting but low incidence of weapon carrying, the school would probably benefit more from a conflict-resolution program than from one stressing tough penalties for bringing guns to school.

In addition to information gleaned from surveys, educators should consider the results of teacher, parent, and community focus groups. They should also review school records (attendance, referrals, suspensions, and expulsions) and community data (census information and police beat records). A thorough examination of existing violence-prevention programs in the school and community may also provide guidance.

What else should schools look for? Nan Stein, senior researcher at Wellesley College's Center for Research on Women and author of anti-bullying programs for elementary students, suggests that programs should include training for any personnel having student contact, including bus drivers, cafeteria staff, and administrators; enthusiastic administrative backing, including any policy changes necessary to support program goals; and more than just punitive reactions to bullying. She adds that schools need to find multiple ways of talking to kids about bullying and should emphasize the role of the bystander. Stein also suggests that schools facilitate parental attendance at anti-bullying meetings by providing free child care and food.

Schools should aim to develop a comprehensive, whole-school strategy. "Conflict resolution programs aren't just about conflict anymore," says Michael Van Slyck, coordinator of the Conflict Resolution in Educational Settings Project at the State University of New York at Albany. "The whole point is to teach a problem-solving approach to life." In other words, changing a school's culture in ways that also aid student learning and achievement is the surest way to keep the peace. ■

Karen Pirozzi is a writer and school psychologist based in Albany, NY.

new and noteworthy

Students' Part-Time Work Affects Course Selection, Proficiency

Part-time work may teach young people responsibility and the value of money, but it can also affect their course selection in high school, their academic proficiency, and—ultimately—their level of preparedness for college and careers, according to Virginia Tech researchers Kusum Singh and Mehmet Ozturk.

After controlling for socioeconomic status and for previous science and mathematics achievement, Singh and Ozturk found that students who work more hours per week in grades 10-12 tend to enroll in fewer science and mathematics courses in high school. This, in turn, has a strong negative effect on proficiency in these two subjects and may limit college and career options for some students.

"It is likely that many students who may be able to pursue college majors in mathematics- and science-related fields weaken that possibility by working long hours and not taking enough course work in mathematics and science in their high school years," the researchers note. They also point out that U.S. students are among the few who work part-time during the school year and that this may be a factor in their relatively low achievement on international math and science comparisons.

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Can Student Achievement Be Linked to Teacher Unions?

Teacher unions are often charged with pitting the interests of educators against the needs of students. However, one new study suggests that students in unionized schools score higher on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and the American College Test (ACT). The win-win situation is reported by researchers Lala Carr Steelman of the University of South Carolina and Brian Powell and Robert M. Carini of Indiana University in the Winter 2000 issue of the Harvard Educational Review.

The trio measured the level of teacher unionization in each U.S. state against average scores on the two college-placement exams. They found that, even after controlling for such factors as sex, race, median family income, and the percentage of students taking the exams in each state, states with higher percentages of teachers in unions tend to have higher scores on both tests.

While cautioning that their findings do not indicate that high levels of union membership raise test scores, the researchers say their report "should give pause to those who characterize teacher unions as adversaries to educational success and accountability."

L.C. Steelman, B. Powell, and R.M. Carini. "Do Teachers Unions Hinder Educational Performance? Lessons Learned from State SAT and ACT Scores." Harvard Educational Review 70, No. 4 (Winter 2000): 437-466.

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The Benefits of Service-Learning

By Senator John Glenn

Elbert Hubbard, a popular homespun philosopher at the start of the 20th century, had some words of wisdom well worth reconsidering at the start of the 21st century: "A school should not be a preparation for life," Hubbard observed. "It should *be* life." How right he was. Survey after survey shows the public expects today's students to be well versed not just in reading, math, and science, but also in the citizenship skills they'll need in a complex and increasingly diverse America. And surely in a nation where even a hotly contested presidential election barely draws a 50 percent turnout, it's time for schools to better engage students in our civic life. My high school civics teacher made government come alive for us; that's what inspired my lifelong interest in public service. Today we have an innovative teaching method for making civics lessons real for all students: service-learning.

By its very definition, civic responsibility means taking a healthy role in the life of one's community. That means that classroom lessons should be complemented by work outside the classroom. Service-learning does just that, tying community service to academic lessons. Students apply their classroom lessons in English, government, science, math, economics, and other subjects to very real community problems. They learn while they serve and thus establish a link between the joy of learning and the joy of service that rewards them throughout their lifetime. Service-learning helps students become engaged in the public issues of their community, and fosters respect and tolerance for others. This education method has been drawing rave reviews wherever it is tried, and I'm excited about it too.

Service-learning prepares students for the most diversified work force in history.

A growing body of research shows that meaningful service to the community interwoven with high-quality classroom instruction benefits students in four different areas. It greatly enhances students' academic skills, fosters a lifelong commitment to civic participation, significantly sharpens the so-called "people skills," and, perhaps most importantly for our nation, prepares youth to enter and mesh with what almost surely is the most diversified work force in the history of the world.

Let me give you a few quick examples of outstanding service-learning taking place in our nation's schools.

• At Spring Valley High School in Columbia, SC, more than 1,200 students are engaged in service-learning projects. Spanish-language students, for example, launched a project to benefit the area's fast-growing Hispanic population, distributing more than 20 tons of food, clothing, medicine, and household products to needy new arrivals.

• Students at Crook County High School in Prineville, OR, play a key role in improving their community's health. For example, health-occupation classes conducted a public awareness campaign on the importance of child immunization that helped raised vaccination levels dramatically. Students recently organized a community health fair that provided free blood pressure checks, updates on health issues facing the community, and an assembly where local hospital officials warned about trauma injuries related to the misuse of alcohol.

High school community-service programs have been popular since the 1980s, and more than two-thirds of our public schools now offer them in one form or another. But only a third integrate them into the classroom to provide a total learning opportunity. That's unfortunate because more than 80 percent of schools with service-learning programs report that most of the participating students improve their grade point averages. A study of a Springfield, MA, high school found the dropout rate plunged from 12 percent to one percent after service-learning was incorporated into the curriculum. The number of students going on to college increased by 22 percent and those achieving a grade point average of 3.0 or higher jumped from 12 percent to 40 percent.

Some critics of service-learning believe that schools step over the line by teaching civic values—that they should stick to the barest of the basics. They fail to understand that service-learning abets classroom learning in a very pragmatic way. There's an old Chinese proverb that goes: "I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand."

My own life has been enhanced beyond compare by the things I learned from being of service—first as a Marine Corps aviator, then as an astronaut in the NASA space program, and finally as a United States Senator. Service-learning provides the kind of understanding that today's students will find particularly useful on our small but wonderful planet. Parents, teachers, and policymakers across the country need to make sure it is available to all of our schoolchildren at every level of their education. ■

Former Ohio Senator John Glenn is chairman of the National Commission on Service-Learning, a 19-member committee of educational, business, government, and citizen-advocacy leaders that will research and recommend best practices in service learning. The Commission, based in Newton, MA, is a joint project of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation's Learning in Deed initiative and the John Glenn Institute for Public Service and Public Policy at Ohio State University. For further information, see **www.servicelearningcommission.org**, *where this article first appeared.*

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The New Face of Homeschooling

As their ranks increase, homeschoolers are tapping public schools for curriculum, part-time classes, extracurricular services, and online learning

By Peggy J. Farber

Adam Schieber's school day straddles two worlds. After eating breakfast with his family, the 15-year-old pads over to an iMac in his bedroom at 8 a.m. and logs on to the Virtual Charter School, an online compendium of Internet links, teacher webpages, lessons, and assignments created for homeschooled children by the teachers of Basehor-Linwood (KS) public school district, where Adam lives. At 10:30 he showers and goes to the local public high school, where his older brother is a full-time senior. Adam takes two classes, chemistry and French. Between classes he joins his brother and pals at lunch in the school cafeteria, and at 1:30 he returns home to finish off any schoolwork left over from the morning.

Some homeschoolers have desks at school and bring cookies to classroom birthday parties.

This is the new face of homeschooling. Where once, not so long ago, homeschooling families were entirely on their own to find curricula, provide opportunities for socializing, and monitor academic growth, today an increasing number of school districts are offering homeschooling parents a rich array of benefits. In Kansas, California, Colorado, Washington, and other states, school districts that once grudgingly granted permission for homeschooled children to participate in after-school activities now openly court them with virtual curriculum packages, school-based enrichment centers, in-service training sessions, and even, in at least one case, a full-time school designed to satisfy the demands of homeschool families. "It's an incredible safety net," says Adam's mother, Melanie Dearing, of the curriculum, textbooks, and professional support she gets from the school district to homeschool Adam and two younger children, Nicole, 7, and Brandon, 5.

Survival Mechanism

Conversations with education officials at the state and local levels around the country turn up a broad spectrum of collaborative practices. These new configurations challenge traditional definitions of public schooling—and in some places they introduce new sources of school revenue. "In the last four or five years, school districts across [Colorado] have been finding ways to attract homeschoolers to school programs," says Art Ellis, Colorado's assistant commissioner of education. "It's a survival mechanism. In some districts they've lost so many kids to homeschooling they're losing revenue."

Some schools pick up a bit of state funding by offering once-a-week enrichment classes to homeschoolers. Others operate as charter schools, helping parents supervise their children's learning at home in exchange for full per-pupil payments from their states. When the California Board of Education polled 317 charter schools last March, nearly one in five identified themselves as homeschool charter schools. An additional 20 percent identified themselves as non-site-based charter schools.

Distance-learning models like Basehor-Linwood's are catching on elsewhere. A second Kansas-based online charter, the Wichita e-School, opened last September with the slogan: "Educating your child at home just got easier." Ninety elementary students were enrolled. At the same time, a privately managed, publicly funded electronic charter school for homeschool and at-risk students called e-Cot opened in Ohio. Initial enrollment: 2,600 elementary and secondary school students from around the state. Meanwhile, former education secretary William J. Bennett recently announced that he will serve as chair-

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This month's focus is on homeschooling, with online links and other resources.

The Forum Feature
Education analyst Diane Ravitch reflects on failed school reforms of the last century.

Also visit our past research features, including those on the new phys ed, high-stakes testing, and cooperative learning.

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man of a new cyberschool, named K12, targeted especially at homeschoolers. The for-profit venture will launch in the fall with a complete curriculum for K–2 and plans to eventually expand its services to include students in K–12.

Although Basehor-Linwood, near Kansas City, started its virtual school in 1998 without a clear idea of who would use it, the project quickly attracted hundreds of homeschool families from around the state. The charter school draws $5,000 in per-pupil state reimbursements for each enrolled child, money that goes into the district's general fund. From that, the district provides each family with an iMac computer, Internet connection, and the services of its teachers.

Public Obligation?

Some administrators say their collaboration with homeschoolers is motivated by a simple sense of obligation to all students, whether enrolled in regular classrooms or not. "We did research four years ago and found that kids were homeschooled for an average of two years," says Linda Kondris, an administrator in Colorado Springs who established a program of enrichment classes for homeschool families. In her district of 32,000 children, 950 children are educated at home each year. "Typically, kids go in and out of the system," Kondris said. "We wanted to try and maintain a good connection with their families so they could come back into the system easily."

The most common accommodation schools make is dual enrollment, a policy that allows home-educated children, especially secondary school students, to take particular classes at local public schools. Ruth Dunnavan's two children are dual enrolled at the local elementary school in the small coastal village of Moultonborough, NH. Beatrice, 9, and Lee, 8, take art, music, and gym classes once a week, and Lee goes every day for lunch and recess. "My son's life revolves around recess," says Dunnavan. The children also go on field trips, have desks reserved for them in classrooms in their respective grades, and bring cookies to school when there's a birthday party. "They get to see what's going in school and I do, too, and I can compare their progress [to their classmates'], something that's hard to do in homeschooling," she says.

It took considerable negotiation and patience for Dunnavan and principal Michele Miller to come up with this plan, largely because the elementary school schedule is relatively freeform. Last year, when art, music, and gym were scattered through the school week, Dunnavan and the children wasted several hours every day, either waiting at school for long stretches between classes or driving back and forth. Miller says only a few families homeschool in Moultonborough so it hasn't been too hard to arrange the schedule to accommodate the Dunnavans this year. Miller even arranged for the children of one 4th-grade class to have art, music, and gym before lunch and chorus on Mondays so that Beatrice could attend enrichment classes without interruption. "But what if there were 10 families like theirs?" Miller wonders.

"Kids go in and out of the system. We [try to] maintain a good connection," says an administrator.

Classroom Exodus

San Lorenzo Valley district in California is one that was beginning to feel the loss of revenue from children leaving the classroom. "We had a homeschool population that was leaving the district," says Eric Schoffstall, a principal at an alternative school in the 4,100-student district that sits in a redwood forest near Santa Cruz. Sixty-five families had pulled out by 1991, when Schoffstall and his school obtained one of California's first charters. The resulting conversion school, the San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District Charter School, draws in 250 homeschool children—and full per-pupil reimbursement from the state, roughly $4,500 per student. "We wanted to give people who were inspired to create programs for their kids, for whatever reason, a vehicle to do it," says Schoffstall. "We call it homeschooling, but really they are non-classroom-based programs."

The school has three basic components: multi-age classrooms that children attend two days a week; contracts with local artisans and experts—such as a neighborhood theater company, a ceramist, a naturalist—for community-based workshops; and a lending library with curricula, manipulatives, computers, audio and video tapes. The school also purchases curricula on behalf of families. "We care what curriculum they use, but they can choose whatever they want as long as they don't cross church and state boundaries," says Schoffstall. "And it varies. Some parents say all of life is a lesson, and others go right to one of the teachers and say, 'Can you give us what the regular first-grade class is doing?'"

This kind of collaboration is becoming a significant feature of California's public education system. As many as 30,000 children enrolled in California charter schools are homeschoolers, says Sue Bregato, executive director of a statewide association of charter schools, the California Network of Educational Charters.

Online Outreach

Teachers who work in both regular classrooms and in partnership programs with homeschool families say they find themselves making major changes in their classrooms after they start collaborating with homeschoolers. Josh Anderson teaches 11th-grade English both at Basehor-Linwood High School and for the district's Virtual Charter School, which accommodates 372 homeschooled students. In fact, all of the online school's teachers also teach in regular district classrooms. Comparing his classroom practice to his online teaching, Anderson says: "I'm pretty passionate about what I teach. So I'm going to approach the content the same regardless of which environment I'm using. But teaching online has turned everything I used to do around. I've organized my classroom completely differently."

Teachers for the virtual school put their lesson plans, assignments, ideas for activities, and tests from their regular classrooms on websites and then guide parents via email to help children master the curriculum. Teachers post the curriculum in its entirety early in the year, so that homeschoolers can move at their own pace. For instance, Adam Schieber, the part-time homeschooler, finished his coursework for the first semester of 10th-

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grade English in mid-October.

Anderson says he's been able to introduce a new level of flexibility to his regular classroom and to his interaction with parents. Just like homeschoolers, students in traditional schools can log on to the virtual school, see what lies ahead, and modulate their pace of learning, zooming ahead through some units and going back to others. Their parents can also log on to see exactly what their kids are doing. "The website is really worth it for my classroom students, but I would never have put as much time and energy into it if it were just for the students in my classroom," says Anderson.

One example of comprehensive collaboration between a public school district and homeschooling parents is the Kent Learning Center in Kent, WA, which serves 200 children in grades 3-12. Academic subjects are taught at the center on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and electives on Tuesday and Thursday. Parents can elect to enroll children in the academic courses, the electives, or both. Ninety-five percent of the parents eventually enroll their children full time; almost all are reentering the school system, having earlier opted out.

Tense Negotiations

The delineation between home and school is permeable. Parents asked for—and got—co-status with classroom teachers when the school was established four years ago. On any given day there are five to seven parents in the classroom assisting the teacher. Almost all elective courses are taught by parents. Course content is subject to long and sometimes tense negotiations between parents and the headmistress, Dian Colasurdo. For example, when the matter of teaching evolution came up, some parents resisted. Colasurdo took pains to assure them that she and the school would respect their religious beliefs even while teaching evolution. "They just want a voice. They want to be part of the process and not feel we are [attacking] them and their beliefs," she says.

Patricia M. Lines, a former researcher at the National Center for Education Statistics, says homeschooling parents have been creating institutions like these outside school systems since the 1980s: "Homeschool families often work cooperatively, sharing teaching responsibilities and classes. If you think about what a school is, once they start doing that, they've already got a school. Years ago I said I thought homeschoolers were going to be reinventing schools on their own terms. I had expected it to happen on a small scale. I hadn't expected public schools to step in and help them reinvent it."

Ironically, the stiffest objection to these new public school–homeschool partnerships comes not from defenders of public education but from its harshest critics, members of conservative homeschool groups. The largest national organization, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA), has consistently opposed all regulation of homeschools, including state requirements of any teacher qualifications and student participation in school testing programs. Currently, only nine states require homeschool parents to have even a high school diploma, and only 10 states require students to participate in standardized testing programs. Skirmishes between state legislatures and HSLDA over these issues have largely been settled since the mid-1990s—in the defense association's favor. Now the association is taking up the battle against programs for homeschoolers offered by school districts. HSLDA president Michael Smith explains: "It concerns us that if a lot of homeschoolers start accepting benefits from schools, ultimately we'll all end up being challenged by legislators to do the same thing. We think that would be a step backward, and it concerns us a lot. That's the reason we oppose it."

Jim Farthing, who edits a newsletter for the Christian Home Educators Confederation of Kansas, says many homeschool parents like the idea of being able to get free curricula and computers from their local schools, but he says others are very wary: "I've heard, 'Hey, I pay my taxes, and I don't get anything in return.

Snapshot of a Fast-Paced Movement

Homeschooling was a marginal practice in the United States until the mid-1980s, when the practice became widely adopted by conservative—usually fundamentalist—Christians. Initially, state education officials acted to block parents' efforts to exempt their children from compulsory education laws, but a series of court battles, fought largely by the nonprofit Home School Legal Defense Association, established the fundamental right of parents to homeschool their children.

Precise figures about the number of homeschooled children are not available, in part because many families refuse as a matter of principle to be counted by school authorities or to cooperate with independent researchers. However, researchers agree that the population grew rapidly in the 1990s. Patricia M. Lines, who studied the homeschool population as a researcher at the National Center for Education Statistics, estimates that there are between 1.5 and 2 million children being taught at home this year, up from roughly 300,000 in 1990. That represents 3 to 4 percent of all school-aged students, though Lines says the annual growth rate of homeschooling has slowed since 1997.

Such growth crosses ideological and racial bounds. New studies by investigators such as Kariane Mari Welner of the University of California at Los Angeles and her partner Kevin Welner of the University of Pennsylvania indicate that nonreligious parents who favor child-initiated exploration over classroom instruction are a large and growing segment of the homeschool population. "These parents, often referring to themselves as 'unschoolers,' follow the philosophy of the late John Holt," the Welners write. (Homeschool advocate Holt was the author of books such as *How Children Fail* and a critic of compulsory education.) Patricia Lines sees evidence that African American and other non-Caucasian families are joining the movement at a faster rate than before. A survey of Tennessee college students found almost half the African American students saying "yes" or "maybe" when asked if they would homeschool their children, Lines notes. ■

— Peggy J. Farber

For Further Information

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Wichita eSchool, 412 S. Main St., Wichita, KS 67202; 316-973-5181; fax: 316-973-7916. www.usd259.com/eschool/

Here's a way for me to get my tax money back.' But the great bulk of homeschoolers think the more we get entangled, the more likely it is that we are going to be regulated. This is proving to be very divisive within the homeschool community. All of a sudden we're at odds with each other."

Because this phenomenon is relatively new, research on partnerships between public schools and homeschool families is skimpy. Patricia Lines published a preliminary examination of several Washington State programs in September 2000 and found that over time partnership programs tended to lead to full-time enrollment. She said the motive for school districts appeared to be fiscal—not philosophical. "This was not, in my opinion, a case of a public school Trojan horse," Lines wrote, referring to homeschool advocates' concern that school authorities would try to gain control of homeschool practices. If anything, she wrote, reviewing accommodations schools are making to homeschoolers' needs, "it looks as if the Trojan horse is sneaking into public school turf."

Lines's study is the first scholarly treatment of public school–homeschool collaborations. But it's a subject that's bound to get more attention as schools and homeschoolers continue to work together. ■

Peggy J. Farber is an education reporter based in New York City. She wrote about efforts to help violent girls in the January/February 2000 issue of the Harvard Education Letter.

Collateral Damage

Social-justice curricula are jeopardized in high-stakes environments

By Lisa Birk

Nathaniel, a factory worker, keeps warm by burning worthless German marks. Teenage Sophie wishes Kaiser Wilhelm II would "come save us all." And Mary's father has just joined the Nazi party. She is glad, she writes, because "[the Nazis] have some good ideas."

In Doc Miller's 8th-grade social studies class, it is Germany in the 1920s. The Treaty of Versailles is still fresh, and Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* is newly published. These Concord, MA, students are reading letters written in the voices of characters they have invented. They are integrating personal, social, and historical facts in an effort to understand the complex dynamics that propelled Hitler to power. Miller, a 33-year veteran, is teaching from Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO), a social-justice curriculum created in 1976 that is taught in 6,000 schools across the country. FHAO uses Holocaust studies to teach students the importance of critical thinking in understanding and protecting the rights and responsibilities of all. As one of Miller's former students told his class, "This is so important. You listen to this course."

And yet, says Miller, the increasing emphasis on preparing for state-mandated standardized tests such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) makes it more challenging to use such curricula. "If you were going to go according to MCAS, I wouldn't have done anything you saw today," he says. The MCAS doesn't cover Germany from the 1920s to the 1940s. Many teachers with less seniority than Miller who were working in a less supportive system might be afraid to spend 10 weeks on content that would not show up on the state-mandated test. Even without standardized testing, many teachers might avoid teaching complex material, including social-justice curricula, because it is labor intensive. Standardized testing only makes it more difficult.

Wherever testing is state mandated, FHAO and social-justice curricula like it are jeopardized. In California, Tennessee, Illinois, Ohio, New York, and Massachusetts, some teachers are using FHAO on a modified basis, compressing the 10-week course into two weeks or transplanting elements to a different grade or subject, reports FHAO associate program director Alan Stoskopf. Sometimes, a shift to another grade level or subject area may be beneficial, but truncating the course can be disastrous. Some teachers have had to drop it altogether.

At the Margins

Paradoxically, state-mandated tests aim to enhance learning, teaching, and accountability, but in many cases may be hampering all three. Multiple-choice tests do not typically reward inquiry or analysis, so curricula that emphasize such in-depth learning are often relegated to the margins of the school day. Measuring the impact of such complex curricula as FHAO would require pre- and post-tests that measure student engagement, emotional maturity, thinking skills, and content. But leaders of such complex programs have trouble securing money, let alone developing reliable tests. Tom Roderick, executive director of the Metropolitan New York chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR), says that despite studies showing that ESR's conflict-resolution program reduces violence and improves test scores, resources for such "social/emotional training" have been cut significantly in recent years.

What constitutes a social-justice curriculum? The broadest definition spans a continuum from teaching interpersonal skills, such as good listening, to service learning to an analysis of social, political, and economic inequities. Whatever the approach to social-justice teaching, most theorists agree that its success depends not only on curricula but on whether teachers, schools, and school policies model and nurture fairness. In other words, "social-justice curriculum involves not only what we teach, but how we teach it," says Michael W. Apple, a professor of curriculum, instruction, and educational policy studies at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

That kind of teaching requires time—time that preparing for standardized tests often doesn't allow. Says Doc Miller: "I

am convinced, after 30 years of teaching, that you need to give time to thoughtfully go into things, to ask questions, to look at cause and effect, to understand [history] from a variety of viewpoints." Proponents of programs such as FHAO believe such time is well worth investing. They cite the needs of a democratic society for an informed and engaged citizenry. "Schooling . . . is not only about learning skills so you can get a job," says Roderick. "It's about thinking, asking questions, and understanding that citizens play a crucial role in deciding the most important issues of the day."

Such understanding may be needed now more than ever. In his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Harvard public-policy researcher Robert D. Putnam documents a sharp decline in civic engagement and social trust since the early 1970s, while the country has become increasingly multicultural. If that is indeed true, then misunderstandings and conflict are perhaps inevitable without some help from public institutions of all kinds, including schools.

Feeling Connected

One study suggests that social-justice curricula, with their emphasis on fairness, may promote healthy behaviors. Published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in 1997, the longitudinal study of 12,000 adolescents, grades 7 to 12, found two protective factors against risky behavior: feeling connected to family and feeling connected to school. "Parent-family connectedness and perceived school connectedness were protective against every health-risk behavior measure except history of pregnancy," wrote researcher Michael D. Resnick and his coauthors. When schools succeed in fostering such an atmosphere, students feel connected, and that connectedness is associated with lower levels of violent behavior and substance abuse, as well as a postponement of first-time sexual intercourse.

A two-year study of 5,000 students commissioned by ESR of its Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) provides partial confirmation of those findings. Created in 1985, RCCP is a K–12 program based on the assumption that violence is learned and so can be unlearned. In that 1999 study, children who received substantial RCCP instruction tended to "see violence as an unacceptable option, and to choose competent strategies for resolving conflict rather than aggressive ones. They also did better academically," concluded principal investigator J. Lawrence Aber. ESR's Tom Roderick hypothesizes that academics improved because "working with the RCCP curriculum fosters better rapport between teachers and students, so the climate in the classroom is more positive and conducive to learning."

Social-justice learning and preparation for standardized testing don't have to be mutually exclusive. For example, six years ago, Hudson (MA) public schools superintendent Sheldon Berman tied service learning to district standards K–12. Six years later, Hudson's test scores are better, and its community ties are stronger. Service learning—a kind of applied social-justice program in which students combine volunteer experiences with analysis—offered rich opportunities for students in Hudson, an industrial town with a large bilingual population. For example, the district's 4th-grade science program includes a hands-on, inquiry-based wetlands curriculum. Students collect and classify samples, help clean up wetland areas and build nature trails, and learn the value of protecting fragile ecosystems. In 1998, those 4th graders scored in the top 20 percent on the state-mandated test. This year those scores dropped some, but they continue to have "strong and improving results on the California Achievement Test," according to Berman.

Two studies link use of FHAO to drops in racism and fighting, and increased social maturity.

Of course, the real purpose of social-justice education is to help students get a better understanding of the world and their place in it. Facing History and Ourselves, which aims to link historical analysis and individual behavior, has been shown to decrease racism and fighting among students and to increase social maturity, according to two studies sponsored by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. In 1996, Carnegie funded a pair of two-year studies to evaluate the program, a large outcome study and a small qualitative case study. The first study compared the growth of 212 FHAO students with 134 comparison students. Teachers of the comparison students also emphasized intergroup relations, racism, and prejudice in their teaching, but they did not use FHAO.

The second analysis—an intensive case study of 19 FHAO students—found that half the students were able to draw connections between "the motivations and responses of individuals to the Nazis during the Holocaust" and the motivations of themselves or others today regarding social issues. One-third said in interviews that they had a better appreciation for how easily people can be seduced into wrongdoing. "Eighth graders are centrally concerned with figuring out where they fit and what belonging to a group means," says program evaluator Dennis Barr. "Issues of loyalty and conformity come up powerfully."

Bleak Future

Despite such promising results, the future of social-justice curricula looks bleak at a time when standardized testing—frequently described as a mile wide and an inch deep—has gained so much momentum. As Monty Neill, executive director of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, points out, testing "is convenient. It reduces everything to a number." And that, he says, suits politicians and business leaders who are more concerned with creating a work force than fostering social justice.

Although 90 percent of teacher educators agree that core values should be taught in schools, only 13 percent are "satisfied" with their efforts, according to a 1999 study by the Boston University Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character. Why? Because, according to the report, the educators were "busy meeting their states' mandated content requirements." ■

Lisa Birk, a former assistant editor of the Harvard Education Letter, *is a freelance writer living in Cambridge, MA. She wrote about grade inflation for the January/February 2000 issue.*

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Turning Obstacles into Opportunity

A series of studies shows how thoughtful, well-connected learning gets stifled—and what to do about it

By Judith A. Langer

Administrators and teachers across the country are trying hard to help their students learn more and score higher on high-stakes tests. But why are some schools and districts achieving much more than others? This question was the focus of a series of research projects conducted over a five-year period by the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA). The studies focused on teachers' professional lives, state and district policy, and reading and writing instruction.

The CELA studies have found that more successful schools and districts have coherent programs that offer students connected, thought-provoking learning experiences at all grade levels. This, of course, merely reaffirms what most educators already know. Perhaps more importantly, however, the studies also highlight the three behaviors or attitudes that present the biggest obstacles to making this learning model a reality.

Teaching to Tests

An obstacle emerges in schools and districts where test formats and test answers become ends unto themselves. On the other hand, where educators use high-stakes tests and the standards-based movement to reach greater goals, student learning is enhanced. Here, test preparation becomes an opportunity for professional collaboration, inquiry, and growth, as teachers and administrators work together to ensure that students do not merely perform well on the tests but also in their schoolwork and their lives. One way this occurs is when teachers and administrators themselves take the tests with an eye toward understanding the underlying knowledge or skills that will "pay off," not only in good test performance but also in situations beyond the test.

In one state where students were required to do persuasive writing on their 11th-grade test, two groups of schools followed very different approaches. One group's administrators mandated that persuasive writing be assigned and practiced for much of the students' junior year. Teachers duplicated old test assignments and developed or purchased new prompts that followed the wording and format of the test. Teachers in another group of schools focused on students learning the various purposes for writing—including but not limited to persuasion—and the ways in which those purposes affect organization, syntax, and word choice.

During the first few years, students in both groups of schools benefited from preparation, but those in the second group scored somewhat higher. In the fourth year, the state changed the testing prompt, and students were asked to do a different type of writing. The first group's scores plummeted, while the other's remained high. The students whose teachers focused on the concept of purpose in writing, not just on test preparation, were better prepared to understand and meet the demands of newly encountered writing tasks.

Teachers should help students look beyond as well as within their classrooms, cultures, and generations to enrich their knowledge.

Using Narrow Definitions of Learning

Another obstacle is the tendency to overemphasize "the right answer." When teachers treat answers as the primary or even sole evidence of learning, lessons end once students have given these answers. Students become conditioned to guess what the teacher wants, and even when they get an answer right they aren't sure why. On the other hand, student learning is enhanced when deeper learning of concepts is the goal. Students have the opportunity to grapple with what they are studying—together, alone, on email, in the library—and reach a deeper and more connected understanding of new [illegible]. In the higher performing schools in our studies, even the lowest performing students are taught to think and discuss and write about new ideas in ways that clarify their understanding and make them better learners.

In CELA, we've called this a focus on "generative learning." As a matter of course, students are expected to go beyond giving definitions and learn to explain, analyze, critique, research, and interpret. The following example illustrates the concept of generative learning in practice.

After one middle-school class read Karen Cushman's *The Midwife's Apprentice*, the teacher assessed students' understanding of the novel through class discussions and writing assignments about the book's content, theme, and style. Next, she asked the students to research the life and social patterns of the Renaissance. They gave oral and written reports comparing what they had learned with the conditions depicted in *The Midwife's Apprentice* and analyzed how the novel's plot reflected the times. Students then worked in groups to answer questions such as "How did her social environment affect the title character?" and "How might her life have been different if she lived in our time?" Later they chose among several other stories to examine how characters' roles are often a function of their times and to identify some features that transcend time. Using this generative approach, students learned to make connections among such seemingly disparate elements as literature, history, and contemporary life.

Viewing Diversity as a Problem

A third obstacle is the attitude among some teachers that student diversity—whether personal, cultural, physical, or experiential—is a hindrance to effective teaching and learning. Student learning is actually enhanced when teachers consider diversity an intellectually interesting opportunity and use it as a way to enrich the classroom experience. Students hear a variety of perspectives and learn to weigh other points of view while rethinking their own ideas, interpretations, and ways of doing things. This involves embracing and building on the variety of cultural and experiential differences that all students bring to their learning.

In higher performing schools, homogeneity is seen as a disadvantage, as setting limits to what students will discuss and think about. Teachers in higher performing schools try to help their students see diversity in their own backgrounds, interests, and histories, and to use diverse perspectives to their own and others' advantage, even in classes where the students seem to be very similar. They help their students look beyond as well as within their classrooms, cultures, and generations to enrich their knowledge about the topics at hand.

For example, one middle-grade classroom we studied included two students with profound hearing loss who contributed to class discussions through a sign-language interpreter. These students brought unique and important perspectives to the class. They tested their classmates' preconceptions—and had their own ideas challenged as well.

In another classroom, this one composed largely of English-language learners from a variety of countries, high school students were asked to choose stories from home (fictional or retold from real life) and to write them, preserving the original linguistic structure as closely as possible. These stories were used as a way to help the students focus on content, language, and structure. Their teacher encouraged them to look for similarities and differences among the stories and used these as points of discussion.

Overall, these studies indicate that effective learning occurs in schools where close attention is paid to what gets taught and how, and where teachers have opportunities to collaborate on effective strategies. Proactive schools can turn the seemingly restrictive standards-based movement into an opportunity to advance the kinds of learning described above. ■

Judith A. Langer is the director of the National Research Center on English Learning and Achievement (CELA) at the University at Albany, State University of New York. For more information on CELA, see ***http://cela.albany.edu.***

new and noteworthy

Do Smaller Structures Help Lower Dropout Risk?

Those who argue that smaller schools are better have fresh evidence to bolster their case. In several studies presented at a recent Harvard Graduate School of Education conference, researchers cited smaller schools, academies within schools, and smaller classes as key elements in successful dropout prevention efforts. Other factors named in more than one study included high academic expectations and better teacher support.

The conference, "Dropouts in America: How Severe Is the Problem? What Do We Know about Intervention and Prevention?" brought together researchers from 10 universities and several independent firms. Programs focused on such topics as the difficulty of obtaining accurate dropout figures (due to contradictory government agency statistics), the concentration of dropouts in urban centers, and effective interventions.

In one study, "Essential Components of High School Dropout Prevention Reforms," James McPartland and Will Jordan of Johns Hopkins University noted that schools could keep many of the students who are currently dropping out by implementing three kinds of change concurrently: smaller organizational structures such as academies; a curriculum focused on high standards and multiple opportunities for success; and support for teacher professional development and planning time.

A study from the National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, & Teaching at Teachers College, Columbia University, included similar findings. In comparing two large New York City high schools that were closed due to low academic performance with 11 smaller schools that opened during the 1990s, researchers Jacqueline Ancess and Suzanne Ort Wichterle found a strong relationship between the smaller school structures and higher graduation rates. They also cited smaller class size, lower student-teacher ratios, performance-based assessment, and support for high-quality teaching as contributing positively to school completion.

A third study by Valerie E. Lee and David T. Burkam of the University of Michigan also suggested that smaller schools are related to lower rates of dropping out. Like the other two sets of researchers, however, Lee and Burkam noted that smaller structures alone are not enough to curb the dropout problem: "School size, per se, is unlikely to directly influence the probability that students will drop out of high school. Rather, there are likely to be other organizational features that accrue to students and staff in smaller high schools. One of those organizational features is how school members—particularly teachers and students—relate to one another." ■

Papers are available online from the conference cosponsor, The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University. See ***www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/publications/dropout.html***

How to Bring a Campaign Slogan to Life

An open letter to President Bush by the Education Trust's Kati Haycock

Mr. President:

This year—like every other year—America's educational system will leave countless young Americans behind. Substantial numbers of poor and minority young people—as many as half in our major cities and over one-third of all Latinos nationwide—will not make it to high school graduation, condemning them to lives out of the economic mainstream. Among those that do graduate, African Americans, Latinos, and poor white students will have 8th-grade reading and math skills. Though most high school graduates will go on to college, more than a quarter of those in four-year colleges and nearly half of those in two-year colleges will not make it to sophomore year. And young people from high-income families will be seven times more likely to earn that ticket to family-supporting wages—the college degree—than young people from low-income families.

Many argue that the federal government cannot do much about this. "Leave no child behind" is a catchy slogan, they say, but education is primarily a state and local matter, not one readily within the influence of presidents—or, for that matter, Congress. Hogwash. Federal policy has had an enormous impact, for good and for ill, in areas such as special education, desegregation, and standards-based reform, which federal policy and dollars have convinced 49 states to adopt in less than a decade.

Washington's biggest influence has been on the way we think about and educate poor children. For years, policymakers dispensed resources for needy children without asking anyone to account for student learning. That changed in 1992 as incontrovertible evidence emerged that poor children could achieve at much higher levels. The shift to hold schools accountable so that poor children would be educated to the same high standards as everyone else is far from complete.

The key question is what you, Mr. President, can do to complete this shift.

First, don't stop talking about the bigotry of low expectations. Always make it clear that you believe that poor children and children of color can achieve at high levels if they are taught at high levels and get help along the way. The evidence is clearly on your side, but many people cling to the old myths that poor children can't learn. Use your opportunities to teach the American people. Share concrete examples of what you mean by low expectations. Tell the stories of schools and districts that are proving that poor kids can learn.

Second, don't back down on your demand that states assess student progress in meeting high academic standards—and report annually to parents and the public. As the best urban principals have long said, "You've got to inspect what you expect." Of course, testing alone will not boost overall student achievement. Indeed, the wrong kind of testing can actually make things worse. But if we don't measure whether students meet standards, those standards will never matter. Federal resources should be used to assure that states develop a rich array of assessments rather than a single, low-level test.

Third, the configuration of accountability systems has a powerful effect on behavior. As you learned in Texas, to improve the achievement of all groups of children, accountability systems must measure the progress of each group. Your predecessor gave states and local authorities control over federal spending for poor students but didn't require in return evidence that poor children were learning more. That's a bad trade.

Fourth, teachers matter more than anything. If we want them to succeed with all children, we must invest generously in the kind of focused, coherent professional development that has fueled dramatic growth in student achievement in places like Connecticut and New York's District 2. Support for high-quality curriculum development—perhaps developed by consortia of states or districts—would also speed progress. A set-aside of 10 to 20 percent of Title I would make this possible.

Finally, there is the matter of resources. Political will and passion alone won't boost student achievement or close the achievement gap. You must be willing to commit significant new federal dollars to your education proposal and ensure that those funds are targeted at poor children. You cannot give an inch on this.

Political will and passion alone won't boost student achievement.

Also, Title I is presently founded on a shameful fiction—that states and districts are providing a level playing field to which the federal government then adds resources to cover the extra needs of the poor. However, in more than two-thirds of states, the base is far from equitable. New York, for example, spends nearly $60,000 more per average-sized classroom in low-poverty schools than it does in high-poverty schools. In Illinois, the spending gap between high- and low-poverty classrooms is $20,000. Even within some districts, there are differences of almost this magnitude. In these jurisdictions, Title I dollars don't even assure poor students of the same amount or quality of instruction as more affluent kids, much less provide extra assistance.

By vigorously enforcing comparability requirements in current law, and by pushing to include in the new law even more aggressive requirements for basic fairness, you could add the federal government's weight to that of an increasing number of state courts in signaling state legislatures that enough is enough. Sure, withholding federal dollars from inequitably funded states might lose you a little support in Texas, which has made some progress in recent years but still has some distance to go. But it would demonstrate, perhaps more than any other single action, that you mean what you say about leaving no child behind. ■

Kati Haycock is director of the Education Trust, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that advocates for improving academic opportunities for K–16 students, especially those of color or from low-income backgrounds. For more information, contact the Education Trust, 1725 K St. NW, Suite 200, Washington, DC 20006; 202-293-1217; fax: 202-293-2605; email: mpointer@edtrust.org; web: www.edtrust.org

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If African Americans are going to make significant progress in education reform, they need to organize, write Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb, Jr.

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Closing the Gap One School at a Time

Teachers and administrators are becoming researchers as they work to narrow the black/white achievement gap in schools

By Michael Sadowski

Things finally seemed to be moving in the right direction. After years of wide, persistent gaps between the performance of black and white students on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the 1970s saw the beginning of a turnaround. The gap began to narrow, and this trend continued through most of the 1980s. Christopher Jencks of Harvard University and Meredith Phillips of UCLA, editors of the 1998 book *The Black-White Test Score Gap*, noted that the reading gap between black and white 17-year-olds (as measured by the NAEP) had narrowed more than 40 percent from 1971 to 1994 and that the math gap had also narrowed, though less dramatically. Jencks and Phillips also saw hope in research showing that black students' test performance responded well to changes in the social and cultural environment. In an editorial for *Education Week*, the researchers wrote, "Narrowing the test score gap would require continuous effort by both blacks and whites, and it would probably take more than one generation. But we think it can be done."

"You have to be very deliberate in identifying what your problems are," says one superintendent.

But data released in September 2000 show very different trends from those that seemed apparent just a few years earlier. While overall scores have increased in reading and mathematics, the differences in scores for black and white students in virtually every NAEP subject area and for every age group are greater than they were in the late 1980s. Perhaps even more disturbing, these gaps seem to be getting wider each year. Even when researchers control for socioeconomic status, level of parental education, and other factors that contribute to scholastic achievement, the score gap between white and black students persists, and no one is really sure why.

Of course, theories abound. Some researchers blame low standards, a lack of resources, and what they consider to be less-skilled teachers in schools that serve large numbers of black students. Others cite a change from the emphasis on basic skill development, which helped to boost scores of the lowest performing students in the 1970s and 1980s, to one on higher order skills, for which students may be less well prepared. Still other researchers insist that, despite controlled study, the effects of racism simply cannot be disentangled from the host of other economic and social factors that affect black students and their success in school.

National Problem, Local Solutions

Frustrated by the persistence of the achievement gap in their districts, administrators and teachers have started to look for answers within the walls of their own schools. They're studying school records, disaggregating test score and grade data, interviewing students and teachers, administering questionnaires—essentially, becoming researchers—to identify exactly where problems exist and to design solutions.

"When you're really serious about closing the achievement gap, you have to be very deliberate in identifying what your problems are," says Thomas Fowler-Finn, superintendent of the Fort Wayne (IN) Community Schools. "You have to know what specific steps to take, and when you take them, you have to know if they make a difference."

Fort Wayne, a district of approximately 32,000 students, 26 percent of whom are black, is one of many schools that are now taking a close look at the achievement gap through a research-based approach. Rather than just focusing on test scores, however, Fort Wayne's plan

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This month's focus is on minority achievement, with online links and other resources.

The Forum Feature
Harvard's Henry Louis Gates, Jr., discusses the digital divide and talks about his new book, co-authored with Cornel West, *The African-American Century: How Black Americans Have Shaped Our Country.*

Also visit our past research features, including those on the new phys ed, high-stakes testing, and cooperative learning.

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involves looking at the gap—and therefore the schools—in a much broader context. School officials are also investigating black/white differences in discipline referral, dropping out, educational aspirations, and perceptions of the school climate.

Through student surveys, for example, Fowler-Finn says that district staff have discovered some key differences in the way black and white students experience school. Black students feel less connected to school and believe they have more negative relationships with their peers and with teachers than their white counterparts. The good news, however, is that the gap in responses to the school climate questions has narrowed by about 60 percent in two years. Fowler-Finn attributes this success to several changes. The district has implemented diversity training for staff, developed school improvement plans with the input of representative groups across age and racial lines, and revised curriculum to include better representation of the cultural contributions of people of color. There are new mentoring programs as well as an orientation for high school freshmen called Straight Talk, in which students learn skills for making the transition to high school successfully. "Straight Talk is good for all students, but it may especially benefit those who are coming in less well prepared," Fowler-Finn says.

The Fort Wayne educator-researchers also found gaps in the way students perceive the role of discipline in their school lives. "There's a perception that if you do the same thing, you'll get a worse punishment if you're black," Fowler-Finn notes. The district has begun to track discipline reports and pinpoint patterns by changing certain variables in the equation, such as the personnel monitoring doorways, the locations where buses drop students off, and the consequences for behavioral infractions and whether these are consistent along racial lines. School staff have also reviewed their discipline codes, and the district has hired a full-time conflict mediator for each middle and high school.

All of these factors, Fowler-Finn believes, affect black students' perceptions about school and, in turn, their academic achievement. And, though the issues are still being studied and interventions are still being designed, some encouraging academic results have emerged. The dropout rate for black students was 10.4 percent in the 1993–94 school year. For the last school year, this rate had dropped to 2.6 percent, less than one percentage point away from the dropout rate for white students.

Score gaps on the state-mandated Indiana Statewide Test of Educational Proficiency (ISTEP) have also begun to narrow. The score difference between black and white 8th-graders in Fort Wayne, for example, has narrowed by 2.8 percentage points for reading, 1.4 points for math, 1.0 point for language, and 1.5 points for the full battery of tests in the past three years. While those numbers may sound relatively modest, Fowler-Finn points out that this narrowing is significant because it has occurred in the context of healthy test score gains for both black and white students.

Closing the achievement gap requires comprehensive study of the overall school experience.

Based on his experiences, Fowler-Finn has concluded that closing the achievement gap requires a comprehensive approach to studying the overall school experience: "If it were just a matter of achievement, then your approach would be to only focus on improving teaching and curriculum. We've learned that that will not be adequate."

Dedicated Networks

Fort Wayne is one of a growing number of school districts that are pooling their intellectual resources in an effort to find solutions to the achievement gap puzzle. Fowler-Finn is president of the Network for Equity in Student Achievement (NESA), a group of 15 larger urban school systems that share data, resources, and ideas with the ultimate goal of closing the racial gap and raising achievement for all students.

The NESA was inspired by another group of school districts with a similar mission but a different set of common characteristics: the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN), which consists primarily of school districts in ethnically diverse suburban towns and small cities. Many MSAN member districts are located in university towns such as Ann Arbor, MI; Berkeley, CA; Cambridge, MA; and Madison, WI. The relative affluence of these communities means that member schools can study the achievement gap amid less interference from such factors as poverty and severe school underfunding. And, the location of the schools near major colleges and universities enables staff to work closely with key researchers in this field.

"The schools in our network share specific characteristics: a historical commitment to racial integration, a willingness to share the bad news about the gap in achievement and a commitment to eliminating that gap, a history of academic excellence—although [there is] an uneven involvement of black and Latino students in that excellence—and significant financial and educational resources," says MSAN member Laura Cooper, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction at Evanston Township (IL) High School. "Because we are often in very liberal communities that have supported and continue to support racial integration, we often have little in common with our suburban or urban neighbors. So we've banded together to share data and do real research on our efforts."

MSAN holds annual conferences that bring together teams from all of its member districts. These teams are deliberately composed of cross-constituent groups that include teachers, parents, board members, and administrators. Responding to a lack of student representation on the teams, MSAN added a student conference to its agenda in 2000, and future plans include teacher conferences at which educators will share findings from the action research projects going on in their classrooms. Though the MSAN's work is just beginning, some ideas aimed at closing the gaps are already being shared among

Editors' note: We have used the terms *black* and *white* throughout the article, since this language is by far the most common in the literature about the achievement gap. We have used the terms *African American, minority,* and *students of color* only where sources used this terminology, or where these specific terms seemed more accurate.

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member districts. Minority students in Evanston, for example, now participate in a program called QUEST (Questioning, Understanding and Educating Students Together), whereby they visit middle schools and talk to younger students about academic achievement. Programs like QUEST also exist in several other MSAN districts. "We're under no illusions that we'll have eliminated this gap in six months," Cooper says. "We know this work is very complex. We're not looking for just one answer."

University Researchers' Role

In addition to conducting their own research and designing targeted interventions, some MSAN members are working with university-based researchers to understand what specific factors affect minority achievement in their schools. Ronald Ferguson, an associate professor at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, has studied the Shaker Heights (OH) Public Schools for several years.

Just as in Fort Wayne, Shaker Heights educators are finding out that understanding minority students' perceptions about school may be at least as important as monitoring their test scores. Using a survey developed by John Bishop at Cornell University, Ferguson found that on most measures of effort and academic motivation, black students score as high as—and sometimes higher than—white students. "The picture we're starting to get is that there's really no resistance to achievement among black students," Ferguson says. He also notes, however, that there may be other factors that stand in the way of black students performing better in school.

According to the survey, black students in Shaker Heights spend as much time, and often more time, doing homework as their white peers, but they tend to complete their work less often. Ferguson speculates that "stereotype anxiety" (a concept attributed to psychologist Claude Steele) may be a key factor in this failure to complete and pass in homework: "Students may think it's better to look like you're not trying than to look stupid. You really don't want to feed the stereotype of ignorance."

Moreover, when asked what factors make students popular, white students are most likely to cite being outgoing and self-confident, whereas black students most often mention "acting tough." "So, what teachers see are kids with this tough persona who don't hand in their homework," Ferguson says. "Black students are just as interested in school, but [when these data were released] this was news to a number of teachers."

The student attitude survey is now being used at a number of other MSAN schools, and Ferguson, along with the 15 member districts, is working on a large-scale study using data from more than 51,000 middle and high school students. As Ferguson notes, having teachers and administrators involved in research is essential: "Practitioners know a lot. We need to draw their expertise into the research process. We're kind of learning as we go about how this can happen. But if we want to get projects into the districts, we've got to get the people in those districts involved. We can't just offer a menu of things for them to do."

Though enrollment in AP can't reverse years of low tracking, it can help some students of color raise their aspirations.

Classroom-Level Research

One of the most glaring disparities between black and white students is in their enrollment in Advanced Placement and other higher-level courses. Researchers like Ferguson have found that some teachers' expectations for black students are lower than they are for white students, and these factors affect tracking decisions as well as students' perceptions about their own abilities throughout their learning careers.

Joan Cone, an English teacher at El Cerrito (CA) High School in the San Francisco Bay area, has made closing this aspect of the gap a priority at her school and has used research techniques to get at the root of the problem. Using a combination of interviews and analysis of students' personal writing, Cone found differences in student perceptions similar to those that have emerged in Fort Wayne and Shaker Heights. "I was interested in collecting data on how teachers and students co-construct low achievement," Cone says. "What I found was that students of color in 10th and 11th grade were not taking advantage of the choices they had."

Cone's findings have resulted in a restructuring of the English department at El Cerrito High. Rather than being tracked into English classes throughout high school, students are now heterogeneously grouped in grades nine and ten and have a menu of electives from which to choose in the upper grades. The curriculum in some of these electives is strongly centered around literature by writers of color. In addition, Cone's department has opened up enrollment in the school's AP courses.

Now, more than 20 percent of the students in Cone's AP classes are African American, and an additional 8 percent are Latino. While acknowledging that merely being placed in an AP course cannot completely reverse the damage caused by years of low tracking, Cone sees more students of color raising their academic aspirations. "There are kids taking AP now who would never be given a chance at other schools," she says. "Will they all pass the AP exam? Maybe not. But at least we didn't say that they couldn't."

The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools in North Carolina have also seen dramatic increases in the number of African American students taking higher-level courses. More than a quarter (26%) of African Americans in the class of 2000 were enrolled in at least one AP or international baccalaureate course, up from 21 percent the previous year and 14 percent for 1996. Overall, there were 974 blacks enrolled in AP courses last year, up from just 77 in the 1991–92 school year.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg is one of five North Carolina school districts that last year took on a special challenge from the state to raise test scores among six subgroups, including black students. Staff in schools where scores go up within each subgroup will receive cash bonuses. Charlotte-Mecklenburg is already making strong progress in closing gaps on statewide tests: black students' scores on the North Carolina End-of-Grade reading test have risen by 18 percentage points

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James Garbarino on Talking to Parents About Violence

What can K–12 administrators and teachers do to get parents involved in defusing violence at school? We put that question to Cornell University professor and child-violence expert James Garbarino, author of Lost Boys: Why Our Sons Turn Violent and How We Save Them. *Garbarino's forthcoming book,* Parents Under Siege *(written with Claire Bedard, Free Press, September 2001), includes insights gleaned from his conversations with the parents of Columbine High School killer Dylan Klebold. In talking to parents, says Garbarino, "The big challenge is to mobilize energy for change without creating hysteria or alarm." Here's his advice:*

- Speak to parents about why the school engages in character education. Explain that an important part of violence prevention is creating a better school climate, where administrators, teachers, and students show more respect for each other.
- Explain what crisis plans are in place.
- Tell parents what mental-health services are available to their children, both now and after [a crisis].
- Make clear that you are open to hearing what kids say [at home] about the school climate, and that you will respond in a therapeutic way. The FBI report on school shooters identifies the fact that kids with homicidal or suicidal intentions almost always telegraph those intentions ahead of time to someone, most often a peer. Some schools have an "anonymous" box where students can leave notes about things they've heard. Of course, under many zero-tolerance policies this can backfire because people think you're asking them to turn each other in, and the policy becomes zero tolerance of kids rather than behavior. The hardest and most important thing is to communicate complete acceptance of each child while at the same time acting to deal with dangerous behavior.
- Reassure parents that you have the intention and resources to follow up ... that if they speak to school administrators or teachers about a problem, some action is going to be taken.
- Communicate accurate information about school violence. It's actually quite rare, but sometimes we create hysteria by focusing on the sensational stories. At the same time, it's important to let parents know that there are other kinds of behavior such as harassment and bullying that, if left unchecked, can escalate.

When speaking to parents of children with problem behavior:

- Point to examples where you have responded a similar problem in a caring, therapeutic way. Still, you have to recognize that not all parents will respond. Some don't think they or the school should get involved in certain matters—that with bullying, for instance, kids should sort it out themselves. Emphasize that even low-level harassment can lead to more serious incidents.
- Help parents realize it's normal for kids to have secret lives and behaviors—and that they're not bad parents if they don't know everything their kids are doing. That places their children's behavior in a context that they can understand and makes the discussion less threatening. At Cornell, we surveyed students about what secrets they kept from their parents. About 27 percent of the males admitted to stealing money from their parents at some point and about 70 percent of those said their parents never found out. Some 32 percent of the females said they had considered suicide, and that 87 percent of their parents did not know.
- Once you've explained the problem their child has at school, give parents time to think about it. Don't turn the first discussion into a confrontation. Lay it out for them and say, "Let's talk about it in a few days." That's less threatening and gives parents a chance to come back to the table with a possible solution in mind. It also gives them a chance to talk to their kids about it. You might give them a pamplet or booklet that would help them do that if it seems appropriate. ■

New!

Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution

Focus Series Six

As school violence continues to grab headlines, this collection of articles from the *Harvard Education Letter* reports on effective strategies for violence prevention and conflict resolution. By examining recent research and best practices, this volume offers positive responses to some of the most troubling questions in K–12 education. Practitioners, scholars, policymakers, and parents will benefit from these clear and timely pieces.

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Closing the Gap

continued from page 3

since 1995–96, and the gap between black and white students has narrowed by nine percentage points.

Superintendent Eric Smith says the renewed effort to raise test scores has resulted in a districtwide focus on research: "We've all become researchers. This school system is totally data-driven. We live by the results of the data we see, right down to my contract and compensation." The district disaggregates test scores according to a number of factors, including race, and school officials have begun collecting data on the attributes of its highest and lowest performing schools. One of the major differences they have found between these two groups of schools is in teaching. According to Smith, their research has found that lower performing schools tend to be staffed by teachers who have less experience, fewer advanced degrees, and higher absenteeism. Changes in response to these findings include programs to help teachers earn their master's degrees and revisions of the staffing formula to reduce the student/teacher ratio in schools where student are identified as having "high need."

A Tall Order

People calling for schools to take the lead in research on the achievement gap—or any other issue—acknowledge that this is a tall order, given all of the day-to-day responsibilities educators face. "It's a challenge to do methodical research in schools," says Cooper of the Minority Student Achievement Network. "It's kind of like trying to change the tires on a car while you're driving down the highway."

Nevertheless, the unique characteristics of school cultures and student populations suggest that the most meaningful changes may depend on research that is locally driven. "So far, researchers have only done research that tells them what they already know: that there is a gap," says Pedro Noguera, a professor at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a member of the MSAN's Research Advisory Board. "What educators need is research on how to change their practices so that they can create the conditions that foster high minority achievement."

And, as the cases profiled here demonstrate, creating these conditions may involve a lot more than just raising standards. Districts may need to conduct home-grown research on student attitudes, teacher satisfaction, class size, tracking, and a myriad of other factors before they understand what goes into—and what can change—student learning. ■

Teachers Helping Teachers

Lead-teacher programs once promised to attract fresh talent by providing teachers with richer opportunities. With record teacher shortages, is it time to try again?

By Karen Kelly

On a November afternoon, Valerie Barattini is driving through downtown Rochester, NY, on the way to visit a first-year kindergarten teacher and her class. "I have to warn you—it'll be a bit chaotic," she says. "My plan is to help this teacher find ways to keep the kids' attention. We have to start with that before we can even think of moving on to instruction." As a mentor-teacher, Barattini spends half her time tutoring and evaluating first-year recruits. She says the position has given her a chance to develop new skills after spending 20 years in the classroom. Once she arrives at the Jefferson Avenue Family Learning Center, she peers into the classroom. "It's going to take a lot of work in here," she says. "But I have a plan and I'm going with it."

When Rochester started its Career in Teaching Plan in 1987, only 60 percent of new teachers got to their second year. By 1999, that number had jumped to 86 percent. In a district where 80 percent of students live in povery and many are developmentally disabled, that first year of teaching is a shock for many recruits, says program director Carl O'Connell. Many arrive with just a few education courses and a little student teaching experience. "Most say they would have left in the first three weeks if it weren't for their mentor," says O'Connell, who oversees 200 mentors and 527 first-year teachers. "We're turning to the experts—the best teachers—to provide them with one-on-one training."

Rochester's lead-teacher program is one of the few still thriving. Lead-teacher and career-ladder programs gained popularity in the 1980s as a means to provide veteran teachers with opportunities to advance their careers and to attract more top-notch college students into the schools. The hope was to transform teaching into a true profession, providing for mentoring and administration. But few lead-teacher programs survived the budget cuts, turf wars, and administrative turnovers that have plagued districts like Rochester. In 1986, 29 states were either implementing or already required career-ladder programs for teachers, which usually include lead-teacher positions. Today only a few states, including Arizona, Utah, and Missouri, still provide funding. The result is that the once-promising effort to create a new generation of teacher leaders has stalled.

Back at Jefferson Avenue, Barattini quietly joins a circle of kindergartners playing with building blocks on the floor. Today, the group is attentive until it's time to put the blocks away. Kids are running for the basket, and the teacher is yelling for them to sit. Barattini quietly models her classroom-management technique. "Everybody have a seat, have a seat, have a seat. Everybody have a seat, on the floor," she sings in a whisper, sitting cross-legged on the floor. "Not on the ceiling, not on the door, everybody have a seat on the floor." Soon, the class is in order. An hour later, after a whispered conference with the teacher, Barattini is off to see another young teacher. "Part of the reason I spend so much time with them is

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that I really feel responsible for their success," says Barattini, who oversees five interns in three different buildings.

Rochester's program, developed jointly by the union and the administration, was lauded as revolutionary when it was introduced. The four-step career ladder begins with new teachers, called "interns," who are assigned mentors who help evaluate their performance. At the end of the year, both mentors and the interns' principals submit recommendations to a joint panel of six lead teachers and six administrators about whether to retain the intern. Approximately 10 percent are not rehired. Those who are become "resident teachers." Once they receive state certification (and tenure), they move up to the rank of "professional teacher," where they are eligible for the district's lead-teacher positions.

Lead teachers on the joint review panels also recommend ways of dealing with underperforming teachers, sometimes voting to withhold pay increases or to require emergency intervention by a mentor. "To have teachers involved in evaluations was viewed as heresy and betrayal," recalls Adam Urbanski, longtime president of the Rochester Teachers Association. "But taking responsibility for who qualifies to become a teacher and who deserves to remain a teacher is the job, first and foremost, of teachers themselves."

The teachers in Rochester fought for this power, yet it collides with a fundamental part of teaching culture—a close-knit, communal environment in which everyone expects equal treatment. "This doesn't exist in very many places very effectively," says Katherine P. Boles, a researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and a former lead teacher in Brookline, MA. "The big issue for teacher leadership is changing the culture of the school." Because the teaching culture is not typically hierarchical, says Boles, "it's hard for teachers to imagine assuming a leadership role if we're all equal."

University of Illinois researcher Mark Smylie says this sense of equality and collegiality has been a major impediment for lead-teacher programs. For a 1997 article in the *International Handbook of Teachers and Teaching*, Smylie analyzed 208 studies on teacher leadership programs before 1996 and found that their effect on school culture was mixed. Some studies found lead-teacher programs led to "new cooperation, collaboration, and collegial spirit among teachers and administrators," while others reported increased "tension and conflict." Effective programs included clear job descriptions understood by teachers, administrators, and union leaders; release time from the classroom for lead teachers; and a precedent for teacher leadership in the school. Successful mentoring programs required training for mentors, matched them with interns in the same grade level and subject area, and recruited senior teachers who could balance mentoring work with their own classroom work.

However, Smylie also found that many lead-teacher programs were undermined either by opposition from principals or the discomfort of teachers, especially about mentors' roles in evaluating teachers. In New York City, the United Federation of Teachers recently proposed a career-ladder program similar to Rochester's, which is being piloted in District 27 in Queens. The administrators' union, the Council of Supervisors and Administrators, filed a grievance to stop the pilot program. Union president Jill Levy argues that teachers are taking over principals' jobs: "This is nonsense. It undercuts our authority. If they want to do administrative work, they should become principals."

Teacher leadership challenges a culture where teachers expect equal treatment.

In Rochester, 2nd-grade teacher Lynn Gatto raises a more fundamental question: If the best teachers are mentoring, who's teaching the kids? Gatto—winner of a 1997 Presidential Award for Excellence in Science Teaching and an active participant in the reform movement—has not pursued a mentor position because she believes her skills are best used in the classroom. However, lead teachers say they can benefit their students in other ways than direct teaching. "When I taught, I felt I only affected the kids in front of me. With this, I affect five times as many kids," says David Gizzi, himself a former intern.

That kind of challenge can help keep talented teachers from burning out, which is a primary goal of the Milken Family Foundation's Teacher Advancement Program. The program, being piloted in five Arizona schools in the 2000–2001 school year and another nine in South Carolina in 2001–2002, includes six different types of teaching positions, an hour a day for professional development work, monetary bonuses linked to student performance, and part-time teaching opportunities for professionals from other fields. The career program's top rung is occupied by master teachers, who are paid an additional $7,000 a year and are in the classroom half-time. The rest of their day is spent leading teachers in their subject area in daily "professional development blocks," where teachers conduct peer reviews or try new curriculum materials. "For a long time, the same teachers took on leadership roles with no economic compensation," says Linda Califano, the principal at Madison Rose Lane Elementary School, a pilot school in Phoenix. "Now they're saying, 'You're going to pay me for that?' It's an incentive for people to remain in the profession."

Of course, while such programs sound good, many argue they should also be judged by how well they affect children's learning. Mark Smylie found that in several surveys conducted of teachers and administrators, the majority reported positive effects on student achievement. Similar findings were released by the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Of Missouri's 524 school districts, 309 participate in a career-ladder program, which requires teachers to work a certain number of hours outside the classroom. Researchers compared the standardized test scores of schools with at least three years in the career-ladder program to those that didn't participate. In the 1999–2000 school year, "the schools that have career-ladder programs had a significantly higher percentage of students in the top two levels for elementary school students in math, science, and communication arts than the non-career-ladder schools,"

according to the researchers.

In Rochester, the district's department of Research, Evaluation, Testing and Records tracked student performance on the New York State English Language Arts 4th-Grade Assessment. It found that students with "mentored teachers had ... a higher English Language Arts performance, even after controlling for teaching experience and the 3rd-grade performance of the students." Plus, the number of first-year teachers in the 4th grade increased from nine to 31 over the past two years, "while student performance on the English Language Arts assessment has substantially increased."

Many educators are disappointed with the Rochester experiment because so many of the original positions have been cut. Still, there's evidence that Rochester's Career in Teaching Program has improved communication among teachers and between teachers and administrators, who treat each other more like colleagues than they used to, says program director Carl O'Connell. "When they're sitting on [an evaluation] panel, you can't tell the administrators from the teachers," he says. "They argue about their philosophies rather than their job descriptions."

At one time, O'Connell says, becoming an administrator was the only way talented teachers could advance their career. Now he hopes a growing number of them will find those opportunities within their own profession. ■

Education writer Karen Kelly is a frequent contributor to the Harvard Education Letter.

new and noteworthy

Are Standardized Tests Less Equitable Than Grades?

President Bush and others have hailed standardized tests as tools that promote equity by encouraging all students and educators to work toward the same high standards. But a recent study of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), the state's high-stakes testing program, has revealed that these tests may actually increase race and gender inequities in some subjects.

Based on data for 736 8th-grade students in six Boston-area middle schools, Robert T. Brennan of Harvard University, along with three colleagues, has found that the gap in math MCAS scores between African American and white students is significantly greater than the gap in their classroom math grades. The same holds true for Latino/Latina and white students: the MCAS is "significantly more inequitable" than grades among these two groups, the researchers note.

In English and science, there are no significant differences between gaps in class grades and MCAS scores for these students, according to the study. The researchers did find more differences, however, along gender lines. They discovered that 8th-grade girls score significantly lower than boys on the MCAS in math and science, despite having higher grades in both those subjects. In English, both MCAS scores and grades are higher for girls.

As the researchers caution, their findings do not indicate that teachers' grades are more accurate than standardized tests, but they do suggest that either or both of these measures is an imperfect indicator of "achievement." Just as teacher grades may take into account effort and attitude, standardized tests scores may reward students for "test-taking savvy," the ability to work under time pressure, and familiarity with the test format.

"To the extent that these traits, and not knowledge and ability in the subject, may be contributing to the widening of some of the equitability gaps, the effect of the assessment format of high-stakes tests merits further and greater scrutiny," the study says.

"The Relative Equitability of High-Stakes Testing versus Teacher-Assigned Grades: An Assessment of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS)" by R..T. Brennan, J. Kim, M. Wenz-Gross, and G. Siperstein is scheduled to appear in a forthcoming issue of the Harvard Educational Review.

State-Funded Preschools Foster School Readiness

States' investment in preschool education is paying off, at least in terms of school readiness and success in the early grades, according to a study published in the latest issue of *Early Childhood Research Quarterly.*

In an analysis of evaluations from 12 states and the District of Columbia, Walter S. Gilliam and Edward F. Zigler of the Yale Child Study Center found that students who attend preschools funded by these states do better in kindergarten and first grade than students in comparison groups. Moreover, the children in the preschool group are less likely to be held back a grade, the study showed.

The meta-analysis was inconclusive on longer-term gains; the researchers could demonstrate no significant benefits beyond first grade. Also, only the Florida study included data that demonstrated a positive effect of these programs on behavior as well as academic performance. Nevertheless, the researchers point out that the goal of school readiness, central to the mission of preschools, is being met by these state-funded programs.

The meta-analysis included evaluations of programs in Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Michigan, New York, South Carolina, Texas, Washington, and the District of Columbia. Evaluations from Arkansas, Louisiana, and Vermont, though originally reviewed for the study, were eliminated from the final analysis because they lacked comparison groups of students who did not participate in state-funded preschool.

For more information, see "A Critical Meta-Analysis of All Evaluations of State-Funded Preschool from 1977 to 1998: Implications for Policy, Service Delivery, and Program Evaluation" by Walter S. Gilliam and Edward F. Zigler in Early Childhood Research Quarterly *15, no. 4 (2001).*

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Quality Education Is a Civil Rights Issue

If African Americans are going to make significant progress in education reform, they need to organize

By Robert P. Moses and Charles E. Cobb, Jr.

The dominant proposals for school reform aimed at addressing the plight of poor black children these days—vouchers, busing, magnet schools—amount to a national program of moving students rather than fixing schools. The current national discussion on school "reform" revolves around designing education as a sorting machine rather than using education as an opportunity structure. If African Americans are going to make significant progress in education reform, we need to see education and literacy as a civil rights issue, and we need to organize.

Almost 40 years ago, early in the spring of 1962, seven of us in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) were arrested for helping escort black people in Greenwood, Mississippi—most of them marginally literate—to the voter registration office. Later, on the stand as a witness in federal district court, I made an appeal on behalf of black Americans living in the Mississippi Delta for the right of one person, one vote. I argued that fairness meant that the United States could not turn its back on the flagrant neglect of an entire citizenry's literacy education and then demand that literacy be a necessary condition for their citizenship—in this case, their right to vote. We won that argument. All black people, in theory, now have the right to vote in this country, although, as the last presidential election reminded us, in practice we are not always granted access to that right.

Black people have also not yet won our right to literacy education in functional public school systems across the country. My current work—an effort I have been engaged in for the past 20 years as founder of the Algebra Project—links the ongoing struggle of minority people for education and citizenship to the issue of math literacy. We think that in an era where the "knowledge worker" is replacing the industrial worker, illiteracy in math must now be considered as unacceptable as illiteracy in reading and writing.

The Algebra Project is retooling the organizing tradition of the civil rights movement to advance an American tradition that argues for education as the fundamental structure for opportunity and meaningful citizenship. No one understood this better than freed slaves during and immediately after the Civil War. The first great mass movement for state-funded public education in the South came from African Americans, wrote W.E.B. Dubois in *Black Reconstruction*: "Public education for all at public expense, was, in the South, a Negro idea."

Their efforts were beaten down and sabotaged after the election of 1876 when, like our current situation, the United States suffered a tainted presidency and, as now, citizenship rights of black people were at issue. Sharecropping followed the collapse of Reconstruction. With this system came presumptions of white blamelessness and of black intellectual inferiority. "The Negro should be taught to work with his hands," wrote one writer in the late 19th century. Real schooling, he added, "tends to unbalance [the Negro] mentally." Sharecropping was still in place when, at the 1964 Democatic Convention, Fannie Lou Hamer, the resonant voice of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, asked the country with her heart, soul, and her two-months-a-year sharecropper schooling, "Is this America?"

In the era of knowledge workers, illiteracy in math is as unacceptable as illiteracy in reading and writing.

There had also arisen in the midst of the Depression the idea of an "aristocracy of the intellect." By the end of World War II, SAT tests and a national selection process that determined who was worthy of the best schools was set in place. This skewed the idea of public education as an opportunity structure—a place where everyone in the democracy was given an equal opportunity to advance—toward the idea of public education as a means of selecting a national elite.

And though we are concerned with math—algebra in particular—the Algebra Project's core idea is that education in public schools should be an opportunity structure for every student. This is the more important discussion about educational needs and "school reform" that needs to begin now. In our vision, public education means quality public education for all students. Such an education remains an unfulfilled promise in this country. We haven't put the money, the research, or the effort into figuring out what a quality education should be and what students could be expected to learn. As was true of the southern civil rights movement, where sharecroppers, maids, day workers, and others who were expected to be silent found their voice, meaningful school reform will require the voices of students and communities demanding the quality education that too many assume they can't handle and don't want. ■

Robert P. Moses, a longtime educator and civil rights advocate, is founder of the Algebra Project, a national math literacy program serving more than 40,000 children nationwide. Charles E. Cobb, Jr., is senior writer for allAfrica.com, a Washington, DC–based online news and information agency. They co-authored Radical Equations: Math Literacy and Civil Rights, *published in March 2001 by Beacon Press.*

Coming soon...

Making Senior Year Count

The Impact of Immigration on K–12 Schools

What Teachers Want

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HARVARD EDUCATION LETTER

July/August 2001
Volume 17, Number 4

Seeking a Cure for Senior-Year Slump

Some schools are working harder to challenge and engage their soon-to-be graduates

By Karen Kelly

Seventeen-year-old Ajah Smith is standing in the middle of the gym floor at Central Park East Secondary School in Harlem. He nervously passes a basketball between his hands as he responds to questions from a committee of two teachers and a student. In the first of his five portfolio presentations required for graduation, Ajah talks about a science experiment he conducted that measured the time it took test subjects to react to sounds. He found that their reaction time slowed when their hearing was obstructed, and he tries to link that knowledge to the effects of variables such as crowd noise on his performance during a basketball game. After ten minutes of questioning, the committee members move to the bleachers to discuss and grade Ajah's written report and presentation.

His advisor, Joel Handorff, is impressed. "I thought his oral presentation was phenomenal," he says, marking a grade on an assessment sheet. "I've seen him go through a lot of work on this written report. I was pleased to see he used the science." Teacher David Feldman is more critical. "I didn't think he made very strong connections between the science and [his basketball experience]," he says, explaining why he gave the essay a lower grade. Still, all three judges give Ajah perfect scores for his relaxed and thoughtful presentation. Ajah is pleased with the committee's feedback, but his work is far from over. "I still have presentations to do in math, science, history, and literature," says Ajah, who's hoping to attend college on a basketball scholarship next year. "I'm trying to do schoolwork, portfolios, and presentations at the same time. I don't have any time to slack off."

As a motivated senior, Ajah may be in the minority. A report released earlier this year by the National Commission on the High School Senior Year describes the typical senior year as a lackadaisical "farewell tour of adolescence and school." The senior slump is blamed in part on early college decisions, time-consuming after-school jobs, and lots of partying. In ongoing research, the commission—formed in June 2000 by the U.S. Department of Education, the Carnegie Corporation, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, and the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation—will continue to explore the reasons why so many high school seniors need remedial coursework in college, why so few complete bachelor's degrees, and how a lack of preparation affects students who go directly into the work force.

The senior slump is blamed in part on early college decisions, time-consuming after-school jobs, and lots of partying.

Some of these difficulties are reflected in high school students' poor academic performance. For instance, on the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, U.S. students scored above average in math and science in the 4th grade. In the 8th grade, they remained above average in science but fell slightly below average in math. But by senior year, U.S. students, even the most advantaged ones, were among the lowest performers in the 16-nation survey. A study of seniors in 26 states by the Southern Regional Education Board in 2000 showed that only 61 percent took a math course in their senior year and 47 percent took science.

That's just the beginning of the concerns. Once these students reach college, they often discover they must take placement exams, relying on knowledge that's become rusty during their final year of high school. In the California State University system, 68 percent of incoming students fail at least one placement test and are assigned to a

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The Research Feature
This month's focus is on improving the senior-year experience, with online links and other resources.

The Forum Feature
Teacher and counselor Jane Katch, who trained under Bruno Bettelheim and Vivian Paley, talks about her book, *Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violent Play.*

Also visit our past research features, including those on minority achievement, cooperative learning, and charter schools.

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remedial class. According to the Department of Education, 29 percent of first-time college freshmen were enrolled in remedial courses in 1995, the latest year for which figures are available. "Kids are totally out to lunch on what they're facing in these placement exams," says Michael Kirst, author of the recently issued report, "Overcoming the High School Senior Slump: New Education Policies," and a professor of education at Stanford University. "They don't realize that if they slack off in their senior year, they'll be hit with a bunch of standards in college that they're not going to be able to meet."

University administrators suspect that some of that slacking off may be due to the marked increase in students applying for an early decision at colleges. According to a 2000 survey of 455 admissions officers by the National Association of College Admissions Counselors, 58 percent of those that offered early decision plans saw an increase in early decision applicants in the fall of 2000. Some of these increases have been substantial—the number of early decision applicants to Columbia University has more than doubled in the past ten years. That means there are a lot more seniors who know where they're going to college in December, rather than May.

Shaking Up the System

The desire to keep seniors engaged has prompted a growing number of schools to beef up senior year by adding interdisciplinary study, career-oriented research projects, and even month-long adventures that focus on personal growth—all aimed at finding a good balance between independence, improved learning, and personal accountability.

Challenging convention has been a goal at Central Park East Secondary School since its inception in 1985. Its Senior Institute also offers a more college-like schedule, with 90-minute and two-hour classes providing in-depth coverage of certain subjects. Fifteen-page essays are the norm. The school's 330 students begin collecting exemplary work in their major subjects as early as the 9th grade. By the time they present a portfolio before the graduation committee, their writing samples have been through multiple drafts and their theses carefully tested. Central Park East students must complete 14 portfolios and give presentations in four major subjects, along with one of their choosing, before they can graduate.

That's not to say Central Park East students are immune to senioritis. It struck senior Tahisha Ayala as soon as she was accepted to a college: "I thought, I don't have to work anymore, and I almost failed two classes. But then I realized I needed those credits in order to get to college." Her classmate Paul Ortiz says simply, "I just want to get out of here, and that's the honest truth."

When portfolios and presentations fail to motivate, the school's support mechanism kicks in. "I think the two big things we offer are small classes and having teachers know their students well," says teacher Shirley Hawkinson, who's on a first-name basis with the school's 55 seniors, the majority of whom live in the surrounding low-income neighborhoods.

As educators work to strengthen programs for seniors, they need to remember that students are going through a time of profound transition.

"We know they will all make it because there are so many props around. They have an advisor, plus their teachers, plus their college counselor. It's the whole Senior Institute that graduates the child." Those relationships teach students the diplomatic skills they will need to negotiate in the adult world, whether on a college campus or on the job.

Focus on Careers

Educators at Eastern Technical High School in Baltimore, Maryland, also view the senior year as a time for students to demonstrate the knowledge they've accumulated over the past four years. But the focus here is significantly different—Eastern Tech's 1,324 students are enrolled in one of ten career majors, and much of their senior year is spent developing a career portfolio as well as creating a product based on research in their chosen field.

"So much of what we do in schools is fragmented," says principal Bob Kemmery, who designed the public school's senior-year program in 1992. "This allows them to see the connection between academics and the world of work and then pull it all together."

When Kemmery first arrived at Eastern Tech, he found a community where academic excellence wasn't the norm. A 1995 study revealed that 50 percent of his students' parents had not earned high school diplomas and that most lived in low-income households. Many seniors lacked any academic motivation. "We had a bunch of teenagers focused on party time, and we were operating in control mode," says Kemmery. "Instead of 'you can't do this or that,' we should have been nurturing them."

Today, Kemmery says, senioritis is rare among the school's 305 12th graders. While fewer than one percent of his students met the entrance requirements for the University of Maryland system in 1991, 87 percent meet them today. Kemmery attributes this change to a complete overhaul of the school's curriculum, a move that increased academic rigor in traditional subjects and added majors in career-oriented areas like health, information technology, communications/multimedia, and construction technology. Not only do students graduate with working portfolios, which they test out in mock job interviews, but they must present the results of their independent research projects to teachers and their peers.

Students are also invited to compete for $3,000 in prizes with a presentation to professional judges. "We had one student in the construction trades who questioned the effectiveness of heat pumps in temperate climates," recalls Harry Cook, the chair of the English department and a member of the National Commission on the High School Senior Year. "He built a model, fired it up, and showed what it could and could not do in this climate. Everyone was extremely impressed with his presentation, but also with the fact that this kid was really excited about what he had accomplished."

A Taste of Graduate School

Riverdale Country School, a private school in New York City, takes yet another approach to prepping seniors for life

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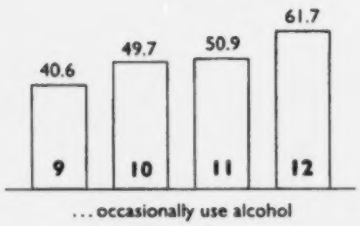
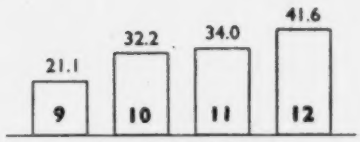
Attractions and Distractions

Risky behaviors—rites of passage to some—compete with serious study for the attention of highschoolers, especially seniors.

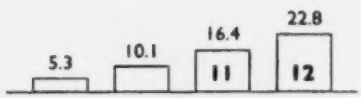
Percentage of students in grades 9–12* who say they . . .



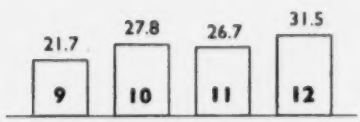
. . . occasionally use alcohol



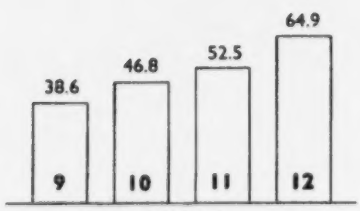
. . . sometimes drink heavily



. . . drove after drinking at least once in the past month



. . . occasionally smoke marijuana



. . . have had sexual intercourse

*15,349 respondents surveyed in 1999

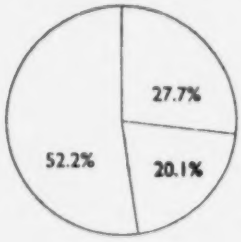
Source: Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Centers for Disease Control, 2000

More than three-quarters of students have a part-time job during senior year, but these jobs may be taking away from time spent doing homework.

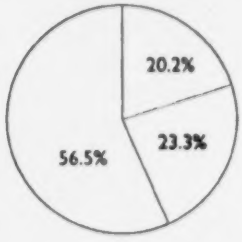
Hours per week spent on homework . . .

☐ less than 5 ☐ 5–10 ☐ more than 10

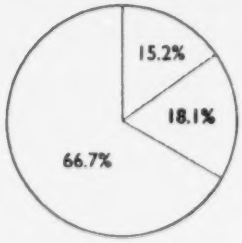
. . . by students who work **0–5** hours per week



. . . by students who work **6–20** hours per week



. . . by students who work **more than 20** hours per week



Source: "Monitoring the Future Survey." Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Institute for Social Research, 1998. Reported in *The Condition of Education 2001*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2001.

after high school. Its Integrated Liberal Studies Course takes a page right out of a college-level syllabus. In fact, teacher Bill Palka and his colleagues borrowed ideas from Columbia University's core curriculum to create a class that would turn the senior year into an overview of Western literature, philosophy, science, history, and art. "The students write five papers in which they have to make cross-disciplinary insights between the subjects, like philosophy and art," says Palka, who relates physics to Impressionism in his course on the history of science. "By their fourth or fifth paper, they're thinking like graduate students."

The school's mostly college-bound 120 seniors read Aristotle, Nietzsche, and Darwin—all of whom they can expect to encounter in undergraduate work. They also keep graded journals about their reading and face an oral exam at the end of the year. Riverdale graduate and Harvard College student Anna Card Gay says the course prepared her for college assignments in which she has to choose her own topic and find her own resources: "As painful as writing those papers was, it really changed the way I thought. I became more philosophical and analytical."

Personal Exploration

As educators work to strengthen educational programs for seniors, they need to remember that students are going through a time of profound transition, says Frank Sachs, senior program coordinator at the private Blake School in Minneapolis. For that reason, senior year needs to emphasize the opportunity for individual decisionmaking and exploration as much as it does accountability.

Blake seniors who maintain good grades and attendance are allowed to design individualized study for the last quarter. Some use the opportunity for exotic adventures. One student volunteered at a Russian orphanage. Another became a glassblower's apprentice, while a classmate helped Greenpeace track leatherback turtles in the Caribbean. All are required to keep daily journals, have weekly conferences with their advisors, and produce written and visual summaries of their experiences. They also receive evaluations from outside supervisors, which are factored into their final grades. When the students return to school, they present their projects at a senior program sharing night, or as Sachs calls it, "the first class reunion."

The experiences prepare students to be independent learners not just in college but for life. "They take complete control of their own education," says Sachs. "After years of having others set deadlines and give assignments, seniors now do it for themselves." ■

Karen Kelly, a frequent contributor to the Harvard Education Letter, *writes from Ottawa, Ontario.*

For Further Information

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Nuts and Bolts of Charter-Business Partnerships

Corporations bring considerable political and financial clout to the charter school movement. Do students profit too?

By Karen Kelly

In 1995, Renee Lerche, director of Ford Motor Company's adult education training, got an unusual message from then-chairman Alex Trotman. Trotman had just received a call from Michigan governor John Engler asking Ford to create a charter high school on company grounds. "We don't want to start a school," a skeptical Trotman told Lerche. "See what else we can do." But Lerche, who has a doctorate in education, was intrigued by Engler's idea. She brought it up during a lunch meeting with the director of the Henry Ford Museum and the head of Wayne County's Regional Educational Service Agency, the county's charter-granting body. The lunch turned into a brainstorming session about a high school whose curriculum would be closely linked to the museum's exhibits. The trio put together a plan and convinced Trotman that Ford should join the charter school movement.

This fall, the Henry Ford Academy will begin its fifth school year. The school is integrated into the campus of the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, across the street from Ford's world headquarters in Dearborn, Michigan. Museum visitors can look through glass walls and see groups of students collaborating on school projects in classrooms that look out onto exhibits. "This school is operating in the middle of a business. It's not off in some secluded location," says Lerche. "They're getting attention from the staff and the administrators, as well as from mentors and tutors from Ford."

It sounds like an administrator's dream—a school that starts with a $7 million financial cushion, classroom space rented for $1 a year, and the use of museum and corporate facilities. Not surprisingly, a growing number of charter schools are seeking the benefits that come from such partnerships. According to the U.S. Department of Education, of the approximately 2,150 charter schools in 2000–2001, more than 100 were "employer-linked." These include schools started by hospitals, labor unions, major industrial companies, and high-tech firms. In some cases, businesses work closely with the schools to create a curriculum, choose materials, and hire teachers. Others simply provide classroom space and resources. Regardless of the level of corporate involvement, these collaborations demonstrate the influential role companies continue to play in the standards-and-accountability movement.

Such partnerships bring considerable clout—political and financial—to the charter school movement, and they are receiving strong support from the U.S.

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Department of Education as well. The DOE gave two organizations, the St. Paul, MN–based Charter Friends National Network (CFNN) and the Washington, DC– based National Alliance of Business (NAB), three-year grants to promote collaborations between businesses and charter schools. CFNN used its funds to host three national forums on employer-linked charter schools, the last of which is being held in Atlanta this summer, and to create a web-based information clearinghouse on charters. The NAB published a booklet entitled "Charter Schools: Leveraging Business Expertise to Improve Student Achievement," which offers businesses suggestions for supporting charter legislation, starting a school, and getting involved with curriculum and governance decisions. That kind of DOE support is likely to continue, since President George W. Bush has proposed doubling federal spending on charter schools.

Proceeding with Caution

Despite the corporate connection, most such partnerships are operated through nonprofit organizations; only Arizona grants charters directly to for-profit entities. In each case, the business partner's level of involvement is different. But when a business starts one of these schools, the autonomy that's cherished by the charter community is often traded for a level of security that only a multi-million dollar partner can provide. "The fact that businesses are getting involved with schools is a huge value added to a public system that traditionally hasn't opened up to involvement from outsiders," says CFNN director Jon Schroeder.

CEOs are not necessarily clamoring to start charter schools. In fact, there may be a lot of hand wringing when a corporation decides to take responsibility for a public school. "I remember when the company president asked me if we should even be getting involved with this. He said it's not our business," says Tom Jarrett, a vice president at Verizon Communications in Delaware, one of six companies that jointly created the Charter School of Wilmington. "But some of us felt corporations needed to get involved. They were doing a lot of criticizing of education and they needed to put up or shut up."

At Ford, Renee Lerche heard similar concerns about liability and whether this could harm the reputation of the company. "They asked, 'What do we know about education and why should we spend company money on this?'" To allay such concerns, Ford insisted on substantial oversight in the design and operation of the school. Lerche and others at Ford were also closely involved with the creation of the high school's curriculum. "I saw Ford engineers telling math curriculum writers, 'This is something we do in engineering that can reinforce what you're teaching.' I'd never seen that before," says principal Cora Christmas.

Not surprisingly, classes emphasize the practical application of knowledge. Lessons are grounded in the nuts-and-bolts of manufacturing technology, and removable classroom walls enable and encourage work in teams of various sizes. Integrated into math, science, history, and language arts studies are lessons on marketing and sales, automobile production,

"I saw engineers tell curriculum writers, 'This is something we do in engineering that can reinforce what you're teaching.' I'd never seen that before," says principal Cora Christmas.

design, purchasing, and finance, with mentoring from Ford employees. Museum staff members work with English and social studies teachers, while engineers collaborate in math and science. Block scheduling is used: students take science, math, and art in one semester, and English, civics, and physical education in the other, giving them an opportunity to delve more deeply into projects.

The school's advisory board remains squarely in the hands of the company. "We created the board in such a way that we would never lose control of it," says Lerche, who serves as vice president of the seven-member board, which reserves five seats for the company and the museum. "We couldn't have a board that would use our name in a way that we couldn't accept." In addition, the Academy relies on Ford for everything from food services to accounting and technical support.

In contrast to Ford, the six corporate founders of the Charter School of Wilmington took a hands-off approach. When the school opened in 1996, the business leaders announced their mandate and then left the school administrators alone. "They told us what they wanted, but they didn't tell us how to do it," says principal Ron Russo, who reports to a governing board in which seven of 12 seats belong to corporate partners. "Like in business, if we don't satisfy the customers, we close."

As with many employer-linked schools, the impetus for the Wilmington school came from a growing concern among business leaders that Delaware students were graduating without important skills. "We had large economic growth, a tight labor market, and we couldn't get people who could do the job. It was a major problem," says Verizon's Tom Jarrett.

So Jarrett and other corporate leaders applied for a charter, calling for an academically rigorous school that would require graduates to have 24 credits as opposed to the average school's 19. High-level math and science courses would be required in every grade, as would character education. Furthermore, the school would be run like a business—no tenure for teachers and pay linked to performance. And except for seed money of $600,000 from the business community, the school would have to be self-sufficient, operating on the funds it gets from the state. So far, so good on that front, says principal Russo.

Without such policies, it would be hard to attract business leaders to the charter movement, says Aimee Guidera of the NAB: "Business certainly understands the value of competition and incentives. There's a strong feeling that a lot of the lessons learned from experiences in business can be instilled in the public education system."

What About Accountability?

But of course public education is not the same as big business, and many researchers and practitioners are concerned that corporate control of charter schools may undermine the democratic underpinnings of what are essentially public insti-

For Further Information

Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, P.O. Box 413, Milwaukee, WI 53201; 414-229-2716; email: cace@uwm.edu. **www.uwm.edu/Dept/CACE**

Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington, P.O. Box 353060, Seattle, WA 98195-3060; 206-685-2214; fax: 206-221-7402; email: crpe@u.washington.edu. **www.crpe.org**

Charter Friends National Network, 1295 Bandana Blvd. #165, St. Paul, MN 55108; 651-644-6115; fax: 651-644-0433; email: job@charterfriends.org. **www.charterfriends.org**

Charter School of Wilmington, 100 N. Dupont Rd., Wilmington, DE 19807; 302-651-2727; fax: 302-652-1246. **www.charterschool.org**

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Henry Ford Academy, Box 1148, 20900 Oakwood Blvd., Dearborn, MI 48121-1148; 313-982-6200; fax: 313-982-6195. **www.hfacademy.edu**

National Alliance of Business, 1201 New York Ave., NW, Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005; 800-787-2848; email: info@nab.com. **www.nab.com**

P. Hill, C. Lake, M. Celio, C. Campbell, P. Herdman, and K. Bulkley, *A Study of Charter School Accountability*. Washington, DC: Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 2001. Available by calling 877-4ED-PUBS or online: **www.ed.gov/pubs/charteract/**

tutions. "This is a direct assault on the idea of democratic control of schools," says Alex Molnar, director of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee's Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education. "The threat to education long term is that you have curriculum decisions, instructional decisions, the whole organization of schools directed by corporations, which are self-interested parties." That is especially problematic because, Molnar claims, the level of oversight for charter schools is spotty in many states and districts. "We have to look at the nature of accountability that's actually there. Experience suggests that chartering agencies are not very effective."

In fact, a report on charter school accountability issued in June by the U.S. Department of Education acknowledges that "many government agencies have not clarified their expectations and oversight processes toward charter schools." Furthermore, the report notes that "[c]harter schools' dependency on donors, lenders and sources of outside assistance brings advantages and risks." Since the charter movement is still relatively nascent, it is "a new public enterprise in which all parties are learning to play their roles."

That's not to say charter schools operate in a vacuum, says advocate Bruno Manno, a senior fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation and coauthor of the book, *Charter Schools in Action*. Ultimately, they are accountable not only to state and local agencies, but also to a public that monitors achievement and demands high levels of performance. "Are these students achieving? If the school is living up to its charter and the students are passing state tests, [the charter founders have] succeeded in what they set out to do. Who's on the board doesn't much matter," says Manno.

The new DOE report, conducted by researchers at the University of Washington's Center on Reinventing Public Education at the Daniel J. Evans School of Public Affairs, says much the same and also points out that charter school teachers, administrators, and staff often have a greater sense of "internal accountability" and incentive to collaborate because the school's survival—and therefore their jobs—largely depends on their ability to work and succeed together.

Even if charters eventually show over the long term that they can deliver the academic results they promise, the involvement of "for-profit" companies will likely remain highly contentious. Meanwhile, students at the Ford Academy will concern themselves with the business at hand. They'll continue to talk to engineers in Ford's crash physics department who design automobile safety features, sketch pictures during art class of historical artifacts such as steam engines, calculate the horsepower of those engines during math, and design ways to develop more energy-efficient homes after a lecture on the environment. Who pays the bills probably won't cross their minds. ■

School-Based Support

continued from page 8

ive to new teachers.

The new teachers who reported feeling the most supported described their schools as having what we called "integrated professional cultures." There, new teachers could expect frequent and meaningful interaction among faculty members across all experience levels, and an appropriate novice status that accounted for their developmental needs while not underestimating their potential contributions. In addition, responsibility for the school and its students was shared among all colleagues within the school. In contrast, many new teachers found themselves subtly excluded from professional contact with veterans. Others, particularly those in charter schools that were staffed mostly with novices, found that there were no senior teachers to whom they could turn for advice or expertise.

While states and districts can assume responsibility for increasing pay, reducing or altering entry requirements, or creating career ladders, such initiatives will ultimately make little difference if a teacher is dissatisfied with teaching. And it is at the school site, rather than at the district, where key factors influencing new teachers' experiences converge; it is there that induction efforts should be centered. Well-matched mentors, curriculum guidance, collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and inspired leadership all support new teachers in ways that recruitment incentives never can.

The success of school-based induction programs hinges on how teachers work together, and the principal can play a central role in establishing faculty norms and facilitating interaction among teachers with various levels of experience. Successful induction may also be promoted by having teachers and principals play greater roles in the hiring process and in selecting their future colleagues. School-based hiring can be an important tool for shaping professional culture and building school capacity.

Establishing support programs at the school would benefit not only new teachers, but all teachers in schools striving to improve instructional practice for students. For example, novices and veterans both benefit from frequent and meaningful interaction with colleagues. Veteran teachers may well learn from and with their novice colleagues about standards-based instruction, the latest approaches to literacy, or strategies for integrating technology into the classroom. Therefore, the benefits of these school-based efforts are not limited to novice teacher induction, for they provide renewal for experienced teachers and the foundation for school-wide improvement.

Improving working conditions and restructuring schools to support individual, group, and organizational learning is a big task. While teachers and principals must do most of the heavy lifting, fostering integrated professional cultures and creating truly supportive school-based induction programs will require time and money, resources often in short supply in public schools. As policymakers direct new resources into recruitment, they would be wise to direct a good portion of those resources toward the schools, for it is at the individual school site where the potential to address the teacher shortage truly rests. ■

The research reported here was made possible by a grant from the Spencer Foundation. The data, findings, and views presented are solely the responsibility of the authors.

Susan Moore Johnson is the Carl H. Pforzheimer, Jr. Professor of Teaching and Learning at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and directs the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. Sarah Birkeland, Susan M. Kardos, David Kauffman, Edward Liu, and Heather G. Peske are advanced doctoral students at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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Smaller K–3 Classes Found to Benefit Students through 8th Grade

Studies have shown for years that students do better in the early grades when they attend smaller classes. Now researchers from the State University of New York at Buffalo and two other institutions have found that the benefits of attending smaller classes in kindergarten through grade three can endure through grade eight and possibly beyond—as long as students stay in the smaller groupings long enough.

The researchers analyzed achievement test results from Tennessee's Project STAR (the Student Teacher Assessment Ratio), a long-range study involving more than 12,000 students. Students in grades K–3 were randomly assigned either to small classes (between 13 and 17 students), "regular" classes (22 to 26 students), or regular classes with full-time teacher aides. They stayed in the smaller classes from one to four years.

The analysis showed no significant long-term benefits in grades four, six, and eight for the students who attended small classes for one year or for those who attended full-size classes with teacher aides. There were greater effects for students who attended small classes for two years, though only some tests in some grades showed statistically significant results.

However, for students who stayed in the small classes for three years the results were significant for nearly all grades on all scales. Students who spent three years in a small class had an average grade-level advantage of roughly 4.5 months in grade four, 4.2 months in grade six, and 5.4 months in grade eight. For students who stayed in the smaller classes for four years, the long-term effects were greater still.

"Few educational interventions have demonstrated this degree of longevity," the researchers note. "However, in order to obtain the long-term benefits, both an early start and continued small-class participation are important."

Based on their findings, the researchers also had recommendations regarding the use of teacher aides in the early elementary grades: "The benefits of paraprofessionals may lie in other domains. However, adding a teaching assistant to a full-size class does not affect the class' average academic achievement and, if increased learning is the goal, is not an effective alternative to reducing class size."

For more information, see "The Enduring Effects of Small Classes" by J.D. Finn, S.B. Gerber, C.M. Achilles, and J. Boyd-Zaharias in Teachers College Record *103, no. 2 (April 2001): 145-183.*

Preschool Intervention Reduces Dropout, Retention, and Arrest Rates Years Later

Preschool participation in a large-scale public program in Chicago is showing some promising results for its "graduates" some 15 years later, as recently reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association.*

Researchers from the University of Wisconsin–Madison and Northern Illinois University followed a cohort of 1,539 low-income youths, primarily African American, who were enrolled in early childhood programs beginning in 1985. Children who received services through the Chicago Child-Parent Center (CPC) Program, a federal preschool and school-based intervention program for urban low-income children, had significantly higher rates of educational attainment than the comparison group. While about half of those who had received the preschool services completed high school by age 20, only 38.5 percent of the comparison group did.

The youth who participated in CPC preschool as children also had lower incidence of juvenile, violent, and nonviolent arrest than the comparison group. In addition, they were significantly less likely to have been retained in a grade (23 vs. 38%) or to have participated in special education (14 vs. 25%).

The effects of the program's school-age interventions were not statistically significant, except on the grade retention and special education measures. In these two areas, students who participated in the CPC program did significantly better than those who did not, and the benefits for students who participated for extended periods of time (from preschool through second or third grade) were greater than for those without extended participation.

The researchers say the study makes a strong case for funding comprehensive early childhood programs like CPC: "Given that the annual cost to society of school dropout and crime is estimated at $350 billion, study findings suggest that the benefits to society of program participation can exceed costs."

For more information, see "Long-Term Effects of an Early Childhood Intervention on Educational Achievement and Juvenile Arrest" by A.J. Reynolds, J.A. Temple, D.L. Robertson, and E.A. Mann in the Journal of the American Medical Association *285, no. 18 (May 9, 2001): 2339-2346.*

New!

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Retaining the Next Generation of Teachers: The Importance of School-Based Support

Clever incentives may attract new teachers, but only improving the culture and working conditions of schools will keep them

By Susan Moore Johnson, Sarah Birkeland, Susan M. Kardos, David Kauffman, Edward Liu, and Heather G. Peske of The Project on the Next Generation of Teachers at the Harvard Graduate School of Education

Throughout the United States, school officials are either anticipating or already experiencing a teacher shortage. The projected need to fill 2.2 million vacancies by 2010 will be intensely felt in high-poverty schools and in certain subjects (math, science, and foreign languages) and programs (bilingual and special education). Recognizing this, policymakers are devising ways to make teaching more attractive, and the competition for high-quality teachers is fierce. Recruiters in various districts can now waive preservice training, offer signing bonuses, forgive student loans, and even provide mortgage subsidies or health club memberships. While such strategies may well increase the supply of new teachers to schools, they provide no assurance of keeping them there, for they are but short-term responses to long-term challenges.

The challenge of attracting and retaining quality teachers is heightened by increased pressure for district and school accountability, often in the form of high-stakes testing and mandated curricular standards. In response to these mandates, districts are introducing reforms and initiatives at a frenetic pace. As a result, new teachers are struggling to learn their craft in dynamic and frequently chaotic environments.

At the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, our research suggests that the key to addressing shortages lies not in attractive recruitment policies but in support and training for new teachers at the school site. For it is in schools and classrooms where teachers must find success and satisfaction. It is there they will decide whether or not to continue to teach.

As Richard Ingersoll at the University of Pennsylvania has found, the "revolving door" of teacher attrition and turnover is a primary contributor to school staffing shortages, particularly in urban schools. Poor working conditions and lack of significant on-the-job training and support are major reasons why many new teachers leave the profession within five years. Our interviews with 50 first- and second-year Massachusetts teachers working in a wide range of schools revealed that many who are eager to become teachers find that they need much more encouragement and direction than their schools currently provide.

For instance, we found that new teachers had few of the traditional supports that one might expect would be routine. They reported receiving little guidance about what to teach or how to teach it. Instead, most described struggling on their own each day to cobble together content and materials, often with no coherent, long-term plan for meeting specific learning objectives. Although virtually all of the new teachers we interviewed had official mentors assigned by their districts, those mentors frequently taught in different schools, levels, or subjects, and meetings with them were intermittent and brief at best. Our respondents yearned for ongoing observations and feedback, but classroom visits by colleagues and administrators were rare.

Well-matched mentors, curriculum guidance, collaborative lesson planning, peer observation, and inspired leadership all support new teachers in ways that recruitment incentives never can.

Learning to teach well is slow, difficult work. Managing a classroom, choosing or creating curriculum, developing sound instructional strategies, accurately assessing student understanding, and adjusting to student needs are complex tasks, and new teachers need time and support to develop the necessary knowledge and skills. However, few of the new teachers in our study said their schools were organized to help them cope with difficulties and become better teachers. As novices, they were eager to watch the experts and develop their craft under guidance, but only a small number of our respondents had access to the wisdom of experienced colleagues.

Neither the structures nor the cultures of their schools seemed to be geared toward their needs as novice teachers. Schedules rarely provided regular time for joint planning and observation, nor was such collaboration expected or encouraged. Meetings were designed to dispense information to individuals, rather than to share struggles and strategies, which is necessary to fulfill a collective responsibility for educating the school's students. Mentoring and other induction programs were limited because they were not embedded within a professional culture that valued and supported these relationships and activities. In the worst cases, school leaders played no role in creating a culture that was welcoming and support-

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D. Kauffman, S.M. Johnson, S.M. Kardos, E. Liu, and H.G. Peske. "'Lost at Sea': New Teachers' Experiences with Curriculum and Assessment." *Teachers College Record* (forthcoming).

H.G. Peske, E. Liu, S.M. Johnson, D. Kauffman, and S.M. Kardos. "The Next Generation of Teachers: Changing Conceptions of a Career in Teaching." *Phi Delta Kappan* (forthcoming).

Other useful resources:

National Commission on Teaching & America's Future, Teachers College, Columbia University, 525 W. 120th St., Box 117, New York, NY 10027; 212-678-4153; fax: 212-678-4039. www.nctaf.org

National Council on Teacher Quality. Online at www.nctq.org

Education Week. "Quality Counts 2000: Who Should Teach?" Available online at www.edweek.org/sreports/qc00/

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HARVARD EDUCATION LETTER

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Sexual Minority Students Benefit from School-Based Support—Where It Exists

New studies document the challenge of being lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender in school and the value of supportive programs

By Michael Sadowski

Six people surrounded the young man and threw a lasso around his neck. They threatened to drag him from the back of a truck, but the victim managed to escape from his tormentors. He immediately reported the incident to the authorities, expecting them to seek out and punish the attackers. Instead, they accused him of provoking the attack by telling others too much about his identity.

This story of physical assault, institutional indifference, and the limits of free speech may sound like fiction, or the kind of incident that takes place somewhere known for human rights abuses and government-sanctioned violence. In fact, it is drawn from a report released in May by Human Rights Watch (HRW), an organization that monitors human rights violations all over the world. But the attack took place in the parking lot of a Nevada high school, the authorities were public school administrators, and the victim, called Dylan N. in the report, was targeted because he is gay.

According to HRW, Dylan's problems at school escalated after he appeared on a local cable TV show about the challenges faced by lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) high school students. Taunts such as "fag," "homo," and "queer" became part of the daily routine, Dylan says. Then the attacks became more physical: students spit at him and threw food at him in the cafeteria. Next came the incident in the parking lot. Dylan reported it to a vice principal, but she never disciplined the offenders, he says. After several other such incidents, district officials transferred him to a school for students with academic and emotional problems. He reports that the principal there told him "he wouldn't have me acting like a faggot at school." He eventually ended up in an adult education program, unable to get a high school diploma.

While Dylan's case may sound extreme, it is far from exceptional, say the authors of the HRW report, called *Hatred in the Hallways: Violence and Discrimination Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students in U.S. Schools.* Drawing on interviews with 140 young people (ages 12 to 21) and 130 adults in seven states, authors Michael Bochenek and A. Widney Brown conclude that verbal, physical, and sexual harassment of LGBT students are widespread in U.S. schools; that many teachers and administrators fail to deal effectively with such incidents; and that most school districts lack sufficient policies to protect the rights of sexual minority students. "Dylan N.'s story is all too familiar," they write, ". . . a story of a young man denied an education because of his sexual orientation."

Verbal, physical, and sexual harassment of LGBT students are widespread in U.S. schools.

As a qualitative study, Bochenek and Brown's report relies not on statistics but on the personal accounts of LGBT youth. It includes stories about the anti-gay epithets students hear in their schools and the effect this language has on their self-esteem; the ways these words often escalate to physical and sexual harassment; students' feelings of invisibility when school curricula include no positive mention of LGBT people or issues; the coping strategies LGBT youth adopt to deal with in-school abuse; and the support—or lack thereof—of teachers, administrators, and counselors. "We took on this issue because we believed it should be analyzed in a human rights context," says Bochenek. "It's about the right to freedom from violence and discrimination, the right to

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The Research Feature
This month's focus is on efforts to aid sexual minority students, with online links and other resources.

The Forum Feature
In a technology-driven, "knowledge-management" society, is there still a place for wisdom and vulnerability? Leadership and management expert Peter Senge leads the discussion.

Also visit our past research features, including those on senior-year slump, arts in education, and high-stakes testing.

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freedom of expression, and the right to an education."

When the report was released last May, it drew both interest and criticism in the national media. The San Diego *Union-Tribune* called the reports of school personnel's indifference to anti-gay harassment and violence "sickening." However, *USA Today* columnist Michael Medved challenged the authors' estimate that two million youth are affected by anti-LGBT activity in schools. Medved also questioned why an international organization like HRW would focus its attention on what he considered to be a relatively minor domestic issue: "The new report implicitly compares the teasing of American students with butchery by some of the world's most vicious regimes—thereby trivializing the evil of those nightmare societies."

Brown defends the two million figure and says it takes into account younger students who are labeled by their peers, often as early as preschool, for behavior that does not conform to gender stereotypes. She also rejects the dismissal of anti-gay harassment as mere teasing, noting that biased language often leads to more dangerous abuses: "When we only pay attention to situations like genocide and torture, we allow the climate of intolerance and discrimination to grow."

Daily Threats

The HRW study is not the only one to document the hostile climate faced by LGBT students in the United States. A 1999 survey conducted by the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN), a New York–based group that fights anti-gay bias in schools, found that more than 90 percent of the LGBT students polled heard anti-gay language either "frequently" or "sometimes" in their schools, creating an uncomfortable school climate for these students. More than 60 percent said they had been the victim of verbal harassment in school, half of these on a daily basis.

Where does this verbal harassment take place? Researchers have found that unstructured school spaces such as hallways and cafeterias are likely spots because students perceive that teachers and other adults won't hear, and therefore reprimand, them there. But several studies reveal the disturbing fact that in many schools, staff often fail to respond to anti-LGBT language even when they hear it. More than one-third of GLSEN's 496 respondents from 32 states indicated that they never heard teachers or other school staff address such language, and even more had heard faculty and staff actually use derogatory language about sexual minorities.

A growing body of research also backs HRW's finding that verbal harassment can escalate to more dangerous forms of abuse. For example, 28 percent of the LGBT youth surveyed by GLSEN had been physically assaulted because of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Such violence is also documented in the most recent Massachusetts Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS) report, a biennial study based on the responses of more than 4,400 students from randomly selected high schools around the state. (The YRBS is coordinated nationally by the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but state and local officials are free to modify the survey. Massachusetts and Vermont are the only two states to include items about sexual orientation on their questionnaires and to break down data along these lines.)

School staff often fail to respond to anti-gay language, and many actually use such language, studies show.

The survey shows that sexual minority students are three times as likely as their peers to skip school because they feel unsafe (19% vs. 6%), three times as likely to report having been injured or threatened by a weapon at school (24% vs. 8%), and more than twice as likely to report having been in a physical fight at school (32% vs. 13%). Moreover, sexual minority youth are more than four times as likely as other students to have attempted suicide (29% vs. 7%), a finding that supports earlier studies about higher rates of suicidal tendencies among LGBT youth.

GLSEN executive director Kevin Jennings believes the verbal and physical harassment of sexual minority youth has not only emotional and physical consequences, but academic ones as well. "The schools are failing our children—at least LBGT children—because of the climate in which those children are trying to learn," he says. "How can you possibly focus on reading and writing skills when you're basically trying to survive every day?"

A 1999 Washington State study supports Jennings' argument. Based on interviews with 58 students who reported being harassed at school because of their actual or perceived sexual orientation, Beth Reis, co-chair of the Safe Schools Coalition of Washington, found that more than one-third believed harassment had hurt their grades. Seventy percent avoided parts of the school building or grounds, 64 percent had difficulty paying attention in class, 59 percent talked less in class, and 36 percent cut one or more classes because of such harassment.

Reis says that her figures provide some indication of how harassment and violence affect LGBT students academically, but that even these may be underestimates. "We don't have a good statistical record of the academic toll this takes on kids," she notes. "What the numbers [in this and other studies] don't show are all the students for whom the harassment was too painful and they dropped out."

Promising Programs

While these studies paint a sobering picture of the school lives of LGBT youth, there is also new research suggesting that supportive programs may make a difference. In a study for the Massachusetts Department of Education, Harvard University researcher Laura Szalacha found that schools with gay-straight alliances (GSAs), school-based support groups for LGBT students and their "straight allies," were significantly more likely than those without GSAs to be welcoming places for sexual minority students. Nearly three times as many students in schools with GSAs, for example, said that lesbian, gay, and bisexual students can safely be open about their sexual orientation at school, and they were significantly less likely to hear slurs such as "faggot," "dyke," and "that's so gay" on a daily basis, the study showed. Szalacha based her statistics on surveys with 1,646 students and 683 staff members from schools across the state.

Gay-straight alliances, which barely

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existed a decade ago, can now be found in nearly 1,000 schools in 47 states, according to GLSEN. Usually after-school clubs, GSAs are places for students to talk about how issues such as homophobia and heterosexism affect them in school, with peers, and at home; seek support from each other and their advisors; and plan programs and activities.

Practitioner training about LGBT issues can also improve a school's climate, Szalacha's study shows. In schools where teachers received such training, 54 percent of students believed that sexual minority students have faculty support, whereas only 26 percent of students in the comparison schools held such a perception. Teacher trainings on LGBT issues can vary widely, from one-time panel presentations by sexual minority youth, parents, and advocates, to multi-day workshops that include role play, curriculum development, and other activities. Arthur Lipkin, director of LGBT services at Cambridge (MA) Rindge and Latin School, has been teaching both in-service and preservice teachers about LGBT youth issues since the mid-1980s. Most important in these trainings, Lipkin says, is for teachers to hear the personal stories of students: "Everybody responds to the notion that kids are hurting or that kids have been hurting in their school and that they perhaps weren't aware of it."

Testimonials from local students or recent graduates are most effective, Lipkin says, but if these youth are not available, films or readings can also serve as the source of student voices: "If [teachers] hear, either through direct testimony, film representation, or some readings, that students in their school or at some similar schools have had really difficult experiences because of harassment, loneliness, desperation, or suicidality, they [are often]

Ignoring Harassment Can Have Legal Consequences

By Michael Sadowski

Only five states—California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Wisconsin—currently have laws specifically protecting public school students from harassment and/or discrimination based on sexual orientation. Only one, California, also protects students based on gender identity. But a 1996 lawsuit demonstrated that existing federal laws are often enough to make school officials liable if they fail to deal effectively with harassment against students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT).

Jamie Nabozny successfully sued school administrators in Ashland, WI, for failing to protect him against anti-gay abuse in middle and high school, dramatically changing the landscape with regard to the rights of sexual minority students under the law. Working with the Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, an organization that fights anti-gay discrimination, Nabozny received a settlement of just under $1 million. The principal of Nabozny's middle school, as well as the principal and vice principal of his high school, were held personally liable in the case.

Nabozny's abuse began in the usual way—with anti-gay epithets in the early middle school years. As they often do, the verbal attacks escalated to physical assault. In high school, Nabozny was mock-raped by some fellow students, urinated on in a school bathroom, and beaten to the point where he required hospitalization for internal bleeding. In each case, Nabozny and his parents say, school officials failed to punish the perpetrators.

David Buckel, one of the Lambda attorneys who argued Nabozny's case, says the Equal Protection Clause of the U.S. Constitution makes clear that the school officials' failure to support Nabozny was illegal. "Under this clause, public schools cannot pick and choose which students will be safe and which students will not be safe," writes Buckel in an article published last year in *Education and Urban Society*. Buckel says this constitutional provision was instrumental to the success of Lambda's argument: "We asserted that Jamie's school made some students safe but treated Jamie differently on two different and independent grounds: because he is male and because he is gay."

The Lambda attorneys made their claim partly on the basis of Wisconsin anti-discrimination laws, but even in states without such protections, school officials can be held liable if they treat harassment complaints differently based on the sex of the complainant. "We often find that male students are treated differently on their complaints of harassment because school administrators believe that boys should fight back physically rather than request help from administrators," Buckel notes.

Buckel adds that in addition to the Equal Protection Clause, numerous other laws can make school personnel vulnerable to charges of discrimination. Some states and municipalities have general anti-discrimination laws that may apply in some cases to LGBT students. The federal statute Title IX, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in schools, can be applied where students are targeted—or their complaints are ignored—because they are perceived as not conforming to gender norms. Moreover, anti-LGBT behavior can be construed as sexual harassment where a perpetrator's actions involve sexual gestures or similar conduct, and school personnel can be held liable if they fail to respond under these circumstances.

Students have also used existing federal laws successfully to win the right to form gay-straight alliances (GSAs). When the board of the Salt Lake City School District tried to block the formation of a GSA at the city's East High School, students there argued that they had the same right to assemble on school grounds as other student clubs under the federal Equal Access Act. In a highly publicized decision, the school board voted in 1996 to ban all noncurricular clubs rather than allow the gay-straight alliance to meet. Eventually, the board relented and lawsuits brought by several civil-rights groups were dropped. ■

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moved to act." Lipkin often concludes professional development sessions with in-service teachers by encouraging each educator to commit to one action they can take to make their school a better place for LGBT youth.

In addition to their emotional well-being, programs that specifically address sexual minority students' needs may also benefit their physical health, according to another study. In a report published in the June 2001 issue of the *American Journal of Public Health*, a research team led by Susan Blake of George Washington University's School of Public Health and Health Services found that "gay-sensitive" HIV-instruction in school was linked to a reduction in risk behaviors among gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. These students had less overall sexual activity, had fewer sexual partners, and were less likely to have sex under the influence of drugs or alcohol than students in the comparison group, the study found. (The level of such instruction at each school was determined based on health teachers' evaluations of their curricula, course materials, and comfort level in teaching sexual minority students about HIV.)

Both Szalacha and Blake qualify their findings by explaining that they merely show correlations between LGBT-positive programming and the well-being of sexual minority students; they don't necessarily prove that the programs cause these positive outcomes. (It is possible, for example, that the same factors that make schools more welcoming environments for sexual minority youth also make the formation of GSAs or the provision of gay-sensitive HIV instruction more likely.) Still, these studies imply at the very least that school climates can differ widely with regard to sexual orientation issues, and that these differences can have profound effects on the ways that LGBT youth experience school.

The Massachusetts Model

It is no coincidence that so many of the studies examining the effects of school environments on LGBT students involve Massachusetts youth. In 1992, then governor William Weld established the country's first and only Governor's Commission on Gay and Lesbian Youth to advise the executive office, as well as state agencies such as the Department of Education, about issues affecting sexual minority young people. Though five states currently have laws specifically protecting public school students from discrimination based on sexual orientation (and one, California, also protects students based on gender identity), only Massachusetts has backed up its law with funding. The annual budget for programs to benefit LGBT students in the state now stands at $1.5 million. This money is used for a variety of purposes, including grants to help schools start and maintain GSAs; for state-funded professional development programs; to provide speakers for school assemblies and programs; and for regional workshops that bring together teams of students, teachers, administrators, and parents.

"How can you possibly focus on reading and writing skills when you're basically trying to survive every day?"

The state support has had an obvious impact on programming for students as well as on research. Massachusetts has the highest percentage of schools with GSAs in the nation, and no other state even comes close in using research to evaluate how school environments affect its LGBT student population. Kim Westheimer, who until last month was director of the Massachusetts Department of Education's Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students, believes the legislation and funding have enabled the state's educators to see LGBT-positive programming as "more possible," since it has the imprimatur of state-level officials. "Policy is important, particularly law, because it sets the parameters of what's allowable. Because of state and federal laws, for example, students who want to start a GSA know that they can do it."

Westheimer also believes that the Massachusetts program has been successful because officials there have avoided a heavy-handed approach. While state law prohibits discrimination against public school students based on sexual orientation, and students in all 50 states have the right to form GSAs under the federal Equal Access Act, other provisions of the Massachusetts program have been framed as "recommendations." The Safe Schools Program has served primarily as a resource to educators and students by providing funding, training, and advice.

"We haven't had a mandate to go into schools and say, 'This is what you must do,'" Westheimer says. "Instead, we emphasize that these programs are about what schools already do. Students are there to learn, but they can't learn unless they have a safe environment. It really is that simple."

While Massachusetts stands alone in statewide programming, school systems in many major cities have also been at the forefront of addressing the needs of LGBT students. As early as 1984, teacher and counselor Virginia Uribe started a counseling and support project called Project 10 at Fairfax High School in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Aimed at lowering the high dropout, suicide, and substance abuse rates among sexual minority youth, as well as in-school harassment, components of Project 10 include professional and peer counseling of LGBT students, maintenance of a district resource center, ongoing workshops about homophobia and related issues for school staff, parent/guardian outreach, substance abuse and suicide prevention programs, and cooperation with health educators. Widely considered the first public school program specifically dedicated to the issues that affect sexual minority students, Project 10 has become a model for similar programs around the country, some of which have borrowed the name and mission of the original organization.

Also in Los Angeles, Human Rights Watch is following up its report with a three-year pilot research and implementation project, planned in cooperation with several local groups, to improve school climates for students in the city's schools. The project is expected to include an evaluation of school policies and procedures, peer mediation, and the training of students as researchers to document bias incidents and evaluate their data.

Another key element will be teacher training in how to intervene when the

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rights of LGBT students are violated. "Most teachers feel very awkward around this issue," says HRW's A. Widney Brown. "Where 30 or 40 years ago, most teachers probably didn't know how to handle racial slurs, now there's a general sense of incompetence around LGBT issues. Teachers are afraid they're going to have to talk about sex."

As studies show, however, programs like these are the exception and not the rule. In most of the country change is slow, and many LGBT students are still attending school with no specific laws or policies to protect them, no on-site programming to meet their needs, and little or no support from school administrators, teachers, or staff. GLSEN's Jennings, who has worked with school personnel to develop programs in 43 states, believes that denial is a major barrier to more widespread implementation. "There's a tendency for everyone to think that the problem [of homophobia in schools] doesn't exist in their community, or that you might be able to do this kind of fancy-schmancy stuff in Massachusetts and San Francisco, but you can't do it here," he says. "This problem does exist in every state and change is possible in every state."

Drawing Heat

Other barriers can be more personal. Some school decisionmakers object to LGBT-positive programming based on their own religious or political beliefs. Others may not hold such beliefs themselves but fear a backlash from more conservative community members. Frank Zak, principal of Mahar Regional Junior Senior High School in the small town of Orange, MA, says he was unprepared for the level of community opposition that arose when a rainbow flag, often used as a symbol of gay pride, was hung in front of the building at the request of the GSA. Protests led to public hearings and a petition signed by more than 300 people to bring the flag down. "I was surprised by the amount of heat that came from that, and I'm still surprised," Zak says.

After some impassioned testimonials from students and other advocates, the school committee ultimately decided to keep the flag in front of the school, where it still hangs along with the American and Massachusetts flags. While Zak admits that he was once ambivalent about providing specific support to LGBT students, he now stands behind the flag, the school's GSA, the integration of LGBT issues into classes, and other fairly recent changes at Mahar based on some deeply held professional principles: "I think we make this too big an issue when it really boils down to something simple," Zak says. "If a student were black, white, fat, skinny, there wouldn't even be a question. Do we want a child to feel unwelcome in our school because of who or what they are? How does that make sense in our profession? What kind of educator would want that to happen?" ■

new and noteworthy

Return of Segregated Schools?

Sometimes the topic of racial segregation in public schools seems like one for the history books. The U.S. Supreme Court's unanimous 1954 decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawing segregated schools, the deployment of federal troops in 1957 to escort black students into Little Rock's Central High School, the Boston busing crisis of the 1970s—we read about these and figure that segregation is no longer a problem in our increasingly diverse country.

Not so, say researchers from the Civil Rights Project (CRP) at Harvard University. Their new study shows racial and ethnic segregation in public schools is on the rise, threatening to widen the already troublesome gap between whites and minorities in educational opportunity and achievement. "This is ironic, considering that evidence exists that desegregated schools improve test scores and positively change the lives of students," says CRP co-director Gary Orfield, who directed and wrote the study titled *Schools More Separate: Consequences of a Decade of Resegregation*. Some findings:

- Seven in 10 black students go to a predominantly minority school, compared with six in 10 in 1980.
- More than one-third of blacks and one-third of Latinos attend schools where whites account for less than 10 percent of the student body.
- The percentage of blacks in schools with mostly white students dropped from 43.5 percent in 1988 to 32.7 percent a decade later.
- The average black or Latino student attends school with twice as many poor students as the average white student—significant because poorer schools often have higher at-risk populations, fewer resources, and lower achievement levels.
- Whites remain the most segregated from other races. The average white student attends school with a minority population of less than 20 percent, despite the fact that more minorities are enrolled in school than ever before and more live in traditionally white suburban areas.

Although public opinion polls show that Americans of all races overwhelmingly support integrated education, a series of Supreme Court decisions since 1988 have undermined desegregation measures, the study finds. To stifle resegregation, CRP recommends several policy actions, including the creation of more integrated magnet schools in cities, better efforts by school districts to document the value of interracial schooling, and more active support by community groups and foundations for desegregation programs. ■

For further information, contact The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, 124 Mt. Auburn St., Suite 400 South, Cambridge, MA 02138; 617-496-6367; fax: 617-495-5210; email: crp@harvard.edu

A copy of the report can be downloaded at the Project's website, www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/

Solving Problems with 'Action Research'

A conversation with Pedro Noguera

While teaching at the University of California, Berkeley, Pedro Noguera led The Diversity Project at nearby Berkeley High School, an initiative designed to address the disparity in achievement between white students and students of color and to investigate the causes of racial separation in the school. Using an action research approach, he collaborated with administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other community members to produce findings that Berkeley school officials now use to address inequities. This approach brings research design and implementation directly into schools to tackle what on-site practitioners see as important. *HEL* assistant editor Michael Sadowski recently spoke with Noguera, now Professor of Communities and Schools at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, about how action research can help schools.

Can you start by giving us a working definition of action research?

I think of action research as research that makes itself directly relevant to practice and policy. That is its goal, to influence either or both of those. Therefore, it needs to be intelligible. It needs to be useful. It needs to be collaborative, whenever possible. And it needs to be driven by the concerns of those who are doing the work, as opposed to by the concerns of the researcher.

Let's say a group of professionals in a school building or a district—a superintendent, a principal, some teachers—identify a serious systemic problem. They think an action research model might help solve it. How do they begin?

The best place to start is with the data you already have. Schools amass a lot of data related to attendance, grades, test scores, disciplinary issues, [and] data on course enrollment, if it's a high school. All of that can say something about what's going on in the school, if it's [broken down and] analyzed by different categories that are relevant, such as race, geography, or socioeconomic status. You can also collect qualitative data. Focus groups with kids and teachers, surveys, even discussions with parents give you a sense of how people connected to a school perceive the issues in that school.

The next step is to ask the question, "What are the patterns?" You're going to look for patterns which might tell you something about how well different kids are being served at the school. The data isn't magic by itself; it doesn't speak for itself. It needs to be interpreted.

"Action research data provides a way for people to engage in a conversation about complicated, controversial issues without getting defensive and personalizing blame."

Once you've collected, analyzed, and made sense of the data, the next question is, how do you present it and use it as the basis for discussion with that school community? [The reason it's] important, and why action research is helpful, is that it can provide a way for people to challenge their assumptions about what's going on in a school.

In particular, I think it's very important for people to problematize failure, rather than seeing failure as normal. Data can help in doing that. Data also provides a certain amount of detachment, a way for people to engage in a conversation about some really complicated and controversial issues without getting defensive and without personalizing blame.

What about moving beyond the data one already has? What are the next steps educators need to take to design a comprehensive research plan on a particular issue?

The first step is to build a team to do the work. It helps if you have a university partner who's done research before, who can help with both the collection and the analysis. [It] helps if you can pay for people's time. Teachers can't do this on top of their existing schedules. In our project, we bought teacher time, one or two periods, so they would have time to work on the research. We also compensated parents and kids who worked with us. That's the way you get consistent participation. The collaboration of all those constituencies was important. Our sense was that it's the process of inquiry, as well as the product of it, that's transformative. Posing the question, coming up with the answers, and then discussing them—that whole cycle is what leads to new ways of thinking about familiar issues.

How do people in a school district connect with a university researcher?

If you have a college or university near you, [find out] who on the faculty, based upon their background and interests, might be willing to work with the district in a collaborative way on an endeavor like this. The thing to keep in mind, though, is that universities often don't provide a lot of support for faculty to get involved in this kind of work because it's not the traditional approach to research. It's easier if you go after someone who's a little more established, rather than someone who's brand new. And it's easier if it's someone who understands schools and the issues that schools are going through, rather than someone who primarily views schools as sites for research but is not open to collaborating with practitioners, kids, and parents. It's a different way of thinking about research.

What are some of the pitfalls of action research?

One issue is denial within the school about what's going on—or at least a lot of rationalization. Especially in a school where there have been consistent patterns of failure for certain kinds of kids, it's often the case that people locate the source of that failure in the kids themselves, or in their culture, their community, or their parents. All of this means the school is unwilling to take responsibility for what it can do to address the needs of those kids. Getting people to the point where they're willing to take some responsibility is an important step.

That's where the research can play a role in challenging people's assumptions and getting them to see how they can think differently about why kids succeed or don't succeed. Some teachers are very willing to accept credit for success—the kids who go to good colleges—but they're not so willing to take responsibility for the kids who don't succeed.

How can you make sure things don't fall apart at the implementation level?

That's the hardest part. That was the issue that we encountered at Berkeley High. We did the work, we generated good findings, we shared it with the school board. [But] the school itself did not have the capacity to implement the ideas. It had gone through three principals in four years. It was in disarray, from an organizational standpoint. In that kind of environment, it's very hard to get people to think about things like student achievement and equity because they're worried about whether or not the bathrooms are going to work, and whether or not they can get copies made. So the learning goals take second place to the survival goals.

Without good leadership to follow through, not a whole lot can happen. This constant turnover of principals at Berkeley meant it took each new principal a year just to figure out the job, much less what should be done. Implementation really depends on institutional capacity and leadership. Do you have leaders who know how to go about the implementation? Do they have the buy-in of their staff, and do they have the capacity, the resources, to pull it off?

Are there any issues that would be tough to address through action research?

Issues around teacher effectiveness need a different form. Those issues are very personal for teachers. That work is very important, but it needs to happen in a setting where people don't feel as though they're going to be scrutinized and their weaknesses are going to be used against them. We thought about how to provide teachers with support but do it in a way that's safe for them. We ended up with an action research project that was all teacher run, where we had teachers actually collecting data on their own work and sharing it with each other. That seemed to work well. So I think there are ways in which you might have to make modifications in the plan [and] format of the research, to take into account certain sensitivities and controversial issues.

Any other advice for educators who are thinking of starting an action research project?

The most difficult part is the public discussion of the research. You want to do that in a way that's constructive, that doesn't result in incrimination. It's very important to think that through ahead of time because the data can sometimes seem to indict the school. How are you going to make sure this is constructive? What are the goals? What are the next steps? ■

New!

Violence Prevention and Conflict Resolution

Focus Series No. 6

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Science classroom

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scientific topics. Even those students who don't have an overriding interest in science may be familiar (through the media) with science controversies and want to learn more about them from school year to school year.

Also, a realistic presentation of how controversy plays out in science provides students with a clearer understanding of what a career in science might entail. Some controversies in science may be subtle and not grab headlines, but they are there nonetheless. Recognizing the dynamic nature of the field, students will realize, through the study of contemporary controversies—as opposed to those from the past that are already resolved—that scientists rarely have the benefit of simple answers and 20/20 hindsight. Each student who engages with today's issues will likely experience firsthand the foggy unknown that is part of the practicing scientist's life—the struggle to extract conclusions from incomplete or conflicting statements.

In doing so, students themselves can become more knowledgeable participants in public debates about science-related issues. Indeed, such discussions may already be going on in their own homes. Because elements of science are increasingly pervasive in our society, and increasingly relevant to all, the investigation of controversy in science challenges us and students to gain a better understanding of how the world really works. ■

Pamela J. Hines is a senior editor of Science *magazine, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and a co-principal investigator of SCOPE.*

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Why Controversy Belongs in the Science Classroom

From bioengineered food to global warming, science is rife with dispute, debate, and ambiguity—which provides great opportunities for teaching and learning

By Pamela J. Hines

We generally think of science as a practice of calm and studied observation, a method of discovery that valorizes facts in the search for clear, unambiguous answers. We also treat controversy as somehow antithetical to the work of science. After all, controversy involves debate, personalities, and ambiguities, all of which seem to have no business in a genuine scientific discussion.

Yet controversy is an important part of scientific practice. Furthermore, as the recent debate over stem cell research shows, controversy is part of the process by which society understands and comes to grips with scientific progress. For the classroom science teacher, controversy can also be a means of engaging students' imaginations and bringing the subject to life.

Science controversies come in many flavors and affect scientific progress in different ways. Research controversies push the process of scientific investigation forward by highlighting the absence of information on a particular point. One such controversy in neuroscience has to do with whether certain structures in the brain develop before visual activity or as a result of visual activity. By raising awareness of the question, the debate has sparked further research that, ultimately, could improve our understanding of the connection between brain development and learning.

Decisional controversies arise because some sort of action (or perhaps inaction, a decision in itself) needs to be taken on the basis of incomplete information. Global warming is just such an issue. The observational approach of traditional science cannot yet reliably predict the impact of human behavior on our climate. Scientific study may or may not eventually resolve the issue, but we still have to decide now whether to alter, say, the rate of fossil-fuel consumption. So the global warming controversy has prompted an active public discussion on our place in the environment.

In other cases, moral and ethical questions surround scientific issues, as in the controversy over the management of genetic information. For example, in Iceland, widespread genetic screening and the unique history of the island combine to produce a database of genomic information that will be very useful for learning more about human development, physiology, and disease. The database is most certainly of scientific value to researchers, but because it contains such individual information, its use may ultimately be a matter best decided on an ethical or moral basis.

In the project Science Controversies: On-Line Partnerships in Education (SCOPE), we have been exploring the dynamics of controversy in the context of science teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms and as a component of research science. The project—a collaboration by researchers at the University of California, Berkeley, the University of Washington, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, with funding from the National Science Foundation—combines websites focused on particular science controversies with in-school projects to engage students in science learning and the use of computers. The website (**http://scope.educ.washington.edu/**) is open to all. Workshops and other project guidance are available for teachers.

Controversy can surprise students and encourage a deeper engagement with science.

Students are encouraged to take a position on a given issue, and then to investigate the pros and cons of their position through guided activities and web research. Portions of the website are also designed for the participation of research scientists, and students thus have the opportunity to see controversy unfold as scientists discuss their research. Students develop relevant, fact-based knowledge, and they exercise the skills of considering opposing views, researching to support an opinion, debating, and writing. Classroom activities may close with an actual debate.

SCOPE topics have included methods to combat malaria, causes of declining amphibian populations, and genetically modified foods. SCOPE classes blend multiple aspects of science, as well as ethics, intellectual property, government and trade policies, economics, and so forth. In considering genetically modified foods, for example, several questions arise: How can peaches be made more resistant to freezing damage? How does the presence of large multinational agrobusiness corporations affect the dynamics of innovation in this industry? What stands between development of "golden" rice and the release of that strain to subsistence farmers? Is a tomato expressing an animal transgene still acceptable to a vegetarian? This list illustrates how controversy in science also provides many opportunities for interdisciplinary studies.

Just as controversy sparks interest among the general public, this dynamic aspect of science can surprise many students and encourage a deeper, more compelling engagement with

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Teaching Civics after September 11

Will the swell of patriotic expression translate into better civics teaching and learning in U.S. schools?

By David T. Gordon

If there is a silver lining to the awful events of September 11, it may be found in the way Americans have responded. Across the United States, the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, DC, have refreshed a spirit of community and appreciation for the democratic ties that bind a multiethnic, multiracial, multireligious nation of 280 million. There have been some ugly exceptions, including threats against Arab Americans and Muslims, but such incidents have been relatively rare. For the most part, tolerance, generosity, and unity have prevailed.

Interestingly, the U.S. institutions best prepared to deal with the shock of September 11 may have been K–12 schools. Following a rash of deadly school shootings, many schools already had crisis-intervention plans in place to comfort and counsel fearful students in case of another Columbine. At the same time, the spread of anti-bullying programs and multicultural curricula in the 1990s laid important groundwork for teaching tolerance and discouraging the stereotyping of Arab and Muslim children.

Schools have also led the way in a national resurgence of patriotic expression. The national anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance are back in places like New York City, where they long ago had fallen out of favor. On October 12, school kids from Hawaii to Maine recited the Pledge in unison, led by U.S. Education Secretary Roderick Paige. Across the country, children have been drawing the Stars and Stripes, discussing America's global role with renewed appreciation (and some apprehension), and writing letters of encouragement to firefighters, police, and other civil servants.

In some cases, this show of patriotic sentiment has sparked controversy (see page 3) and raised concerns that students whose views don't fall into line with conventional wisdom will be intimidated or harassed. "I am concerned we will stifle dissent, and that we'll emphasize patriotism at the expense of citizenship," says Tony Wagner, codirector of the Change Leadership Group at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "Students need more than the Pledge of Allegiance. They need time for thoughtful discussions about who we are as Americans."

"What unites us? What principles and values define us? What does it mean to be an American?"

Whether today's burst of patriotism can serve as a springboard to more thoughtful teaching and learning in citizenship remains to be seen. Those who believe civics and other social studies subjects have gotten short shrift in the past decade certainly hope so. "This has strengthened the resolve of history and social-science teachers to make sure citizenship, social issues, and geography play a bigger role in the curriculum so that kids can be part of the national dialogue, too," says Cricket F.L. Kidwell, president of the California Council for the Social Studies.

Indeed, September 11 has created an environment ripe for teaching the fundamentals of constitutional government, democracy, and the U.S. role in promoting (or sometimes inhibiting) the spread of such values. What common goals and ideals do we have—and are they worth defending? What similar challenges have we faced in our short 225-year history and how did we respond to

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The Forum Feature
Ray Kurzweil and Howard Gardner on new technologies and their implications for education and society.

Also visit our past research features, including those on senior-year slump, arts in education, and homeschooling.

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them? What are the responsibilities of government in times of crisis? How do we balance security needs with respect for individual rights?

Given the disappointing results of the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in civics, improvement in that subject is clearly needed. The congressionally mandated NAEP revealed that a large majority of the 22,000 U.S. students tested (grades 4, 8, and 12) have a weak understanding of the purpose and function of their Constitutional government. For example, only 15 percent of 4th graders could name two services paid for with tax dollars; just 6 percent of 8th graders could describe how a country benefits from having a constitution; less than one-third of high school seniors knew that the U.S. Supreme Court is charged with using judicial review to preserve minority rights. In all, just about 20 percent of students at each grade level ranked "proficient" or "advanced" in their understanding of civics.

That may help explain the low participation of young people in the most basic civic exercise: voting. Just 17 percent of 18- to-29-year-olds bothered to vote in the most closely contested presidential election in U.S. history in November 2000. That continued a downward trend from about 50 percent in 1972, the first year 18-year-olds could vote. In the annual survey of 404,667 U.S. college freshmen by researchers at UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute, only 28.1 percent of those interviewed in 2000 said they kept up with political affairs, down from 60.3 percent in 1966. Just 16.4 percent discussed politics frequently, half as many as in 1968.

Of course, widespread disinterest in and disdain for U.S. political and civic life is by no means a problem confined to youth. Only 51 percent of eligible voters of all ages turned out for the November 2000 election. For three decades, the credibility of U.S. government institutions and political processes has been under attack from both Left and Right, fostering widespread cynicism. At the same time, Americans have become increasingly detached from community life, as chronicled in Harvard sociologist Robert D. Putnam's compelling book, *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000. Young people are following the example set by the adults around them.

Impolite Word?

Another factor may also help explain students' disinterest in civic life and disappointing academic outcomes in related subjects: an erosion of patriotism. That's the case made by William Damon, education professor and director of the Center on Adolescence at Stanford University, in a newly published essay entitled "Restoring Civil Identity Among the Young." He argues that since Vietnam patriotism has become an "impolite word" in academic circles and has been shut out of many K–12 social studies curricula. "When patriotism does come up in education, the goal is usually to find ways to guard against its dangers," he writes. "Many educators see patriotism as antithetical to a more global perspective on humanity and thus as the enemy of such humane conditions as peace and justice."

The result? Students do not learn to positively identify with democratic society and consequently are unwilling—

In the 1998 NAEP in civics, just 6 percent of 8th graders could describe how having a constitution benefits a country.

unable, really—to commit to it. This is especially harmful in the K–12 years, Damon writes, when students are developing their self-identities. "They need to acquire a love of their society, a sense of pride in its best traditions, an emotional affiliation with the broader community of state, a sense of patriotism in the benevolent and inclusive senses of that word, if they are to develop a civil identity. All this must be done through action as well as words, in multiple contexts, and in ways that inspire students on the emotional as well as the intellectual plane."

Without a rich and thoughtful appreciation for democratic community—and how an inspired, knowledgeable citizenry can improve it—kids have no reason to make a commitment to it. Damon is not suggesting that social studies curricula function as some kind of national hagiography, ignoring the country's failures. But authentic and constructive criticism—rather than cynicism—is only possible if it is grounded in a positive and sympathetic understanding of the country.

"It's all about keeping perspective," Damon tells the *Harvard Education Letter*. "We need to be perfectly honest with kids about our failures, but that doesn't mean they should come away from social studies class with a sense that America is something to be ashamed of and that citizenship is something to disaffiliate with. That's very dangerous for society and for democracy. And it's dangerous for kids' individual development. It robs them of something positive they can identify with, a positive sense of purpose."

Parents seem to agree. A 1998 survey by the nonpartisan research organization Public Agenda showed that 84 percent of parents with school-aged children said they believe that the United States is a special country and they want schools to convey that belief to their children by teaching about its heroes and traditions. Similar numbers identified the American ideal as including equal opportunity, individual freedom, and tolerance and respect for others. Those findings were consistent across racial and ethnic groups. Furthermore, the poll of 801 foreign-born and U.S.-born parents revealed nothing naive or reflexive in this patriotism: nine in 10 also agreed that the U.S. government sometimes lies to the public, and nearly two-thirds said the United States does not live up to all of its ideals.

In the wake of September 11, several textbook publishers will be revising their books to accommodate that view and the new national mood. For example, the authors of *The American Nation*, Prentice-Hall's best-selling U.S. history textbook for middle school students, will likely replace a conclusion emphasizing diversity with one about public service and the common quest for human freedom. "There will be a greater focus on pluralistic integration," says co-author Michael Stoff, associate professor of history at the University of Texas, Austin. "The shift is not to 'we're all the same' but to 'we're all Americans.' One thing we stress is that diversity is the great strength in America and that respecting those differences is essential. Unity ought not to trump the right to dissent. That's how a nation of many becomes a nation of one."

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Patriotism or Peer Pressure?

Renewed interest in the Pledge of Allegiance raises free-speech questions

By Michael Sadowski

Since September 11, students all over the country have been reciting the Pledge of Allegiance with greater frequency and fervor. The Pledge, which had gone the way of Latin class in many schools, is now returning as a daily practice in more and more classrooms. This change was highlighted by the "Pledge Across America" on October 12, during which U.S. Education Secretary Roderick Paige led students from Hawaii to Maine in a simultaneous recitation of the national oath.

While participation in that event was voluntary, there has been a recent increase in the number of states, municipalities, and school boards requiring schools to lead daily recitations of the Pledge. In the community hardest hit by the September 11 disaster, the New York City Board of Education recently voted for a daily Pledge in the city's schools; 24 states and numerous cities and towns currently have laws outlining similar requirements.

Schools may be bound by these laws, but individual students and teachers are not. Under a 1943 U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*West Virginia Board of Education v. Barnette*), it is unconstitutional for schools to require students or teachers to recite the Pledge or to punish those who refuse to do so for religious, philosophical, or other reasons.

Though perhaps somewhat contradictory, the laws surrounding the Pledge are relatively clear. What's less clear is how these laws are actually being applied in schools. In a school where a daily Pledge is mandated, are students and teachers aware that they have the right to opt out? If so, will they feel comfortable or safe declining to participate, given the power dynamics that define the relationships among students, teachers, and administrators?

In a school where a daily Pledge is mandated, are students and teachers aware that they have the right to opt out?

The Madison (WI) school board recently found itself in a quagmire when it attempted to address these questions under a new state law requiring schools to offer either the Pledge of Allegiance or "The Star-Spangled Banner" on a daily basis. Citing some parents' objections to the law, as well as concerns about the degree to which such participation was "coercive" in some schools, board member Bill Keys proposed—and the board approved—a solution that was already in effect at several Madison schools: schools could play an instrumental version of the anthem daily and let students choose whether to sing the anthem, salute the flag, or remain silent.

Compromise and Caveats

The board's decision sparked outrage, not only in Madison but across the country. Opponents called the vote a ban on the Pledge and anthem that deprived children of the opportunity to express their patriotism and unity at school, a charge that Keys disputes. "It was a compromise to comply with the law," he says. "It had absolutely nothing to do with a ban on the Pledge of Allegiance. We cannot ban the Pledge—that's controlling speech."

Facing intense pressure, including threats of a board recall, the cutoff of state funding, and thousands of negative emails and phone calls, the board reversed its decision. However, the board has required that all recitations of the Pledge or national anthem be preceded by the following caveat: "We live in a nation of freedom. Participation in the Pledge or anthem is voluntary. Those who wish to participate should now stand. Others may remain seated."

Particularly in a time of national crisis, students can also face peer pressure to conform to group standards of patriotism. Shelly Tougas, assistant director of communications for the Minnesota School Boards Association, which has studied the use of the Pledge in the state's schools, says that students who choose not to recite the Pledge can be targeted for bullying or be called unpatriotic by their peers. "That's a big concern of ours," Tougas says. "Sometimes the opt-out can create such a distraction that the kid who wants to opt out can't."

Some civil libertarians don't object to the Pledge in schools as long as students are aware of their right to abstain and can do so without being stigmatized. Terri Schroeder, legislative analyst for the American Civil Liberties Union, praised Secretary Paige for making the "Pledge Across America" voluntary, given the event's focus on "the foundations of our free society."

Elliot Mincberg, vice president and legal director of People for the American Way, says he believes most school officials recognize students' right to abstain from the Pledge, but that this right may not always be communicated "in an affirmative way." "I think it would be a good idea to make [the right to opt out] more clear," Mincberg says. He acknowledges, however, that doing so can seem artificial if not handled correctly: "It's awkward if teachers have to give the equivalent of a Miranda warning."

As an alternative, Mincberg recommends adding study of the Pledge to lessons on historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution so that students understand what rights they are afforded as Americans: "We want to do things that will bring our country together, but will also preserve the individual liberties that make our country different from a place like Afghanistan." ■

Teaching Civics

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Cultivating a sense of the "glue" that binds the many pages of American society is an essential part of good civics instruction, says Charles N. Quigley, director of the California-based Center for Civic Education: "What unites us? What are the principles and values that define us? What does it mean to be an American?"

Does Civics Help?

Assuming that the recent showing of patriotic sentiment could serve as a spark for deeper, more thoughtful civics education, one question begs an answer: does civics instruction actually produce more-informed citizens? Based on research done in the 1960s, the longstanding conventional wisdom among political scientists has been that K–12 civics instruction does not result in greater knowledge about politics and government among high school graduates. However, a book-length analysis of the 1998 NAEP data by political scientists Richard G. Niemi (University of Rochester) and Jane Junn (Rutgers University) reveals the opposite. High school seniors who had taken dedicated courses in civics or government demonstrated significantly more political knowledge than those who hadn't.

Of course, direct instruction is not enough. Niemi and Junn's analysis also revealed important characteristics of effective civics instruction. First, students who studied a wide variety of topics, from criminal justice to state and local government to the role of lobbyists, achieved at higher levels. And those whose classes connected theory and history to contemporary practice through frequent discussions of current events scored better—impressive, write Niemi and Junn, because NAEP did not test students' knowledge of contemporary politics per se.

All told, those who had dedicated civics instruction that covered a wide variety of topics and included frequent discussions of contemporary events performed 11 percent better than students who didn't have such instruction. "One finding is clear and consistent: school and curriculum have an enduring impact on the development of civic knowledge in high school students," write Niemi and Junn. In addition, more knowledgeable students had more confidence that the American political system, while not perfect, is responsive, i.e., that their vote really counts, a finding "consistent with the argument that lack of knowledge leads to greater cynicism," they write.

For students who do not go to college—and a higher proportion of those from a low socioeconomic status do not—K–12 civics education may be the only opportunity they have to develop the empowering citizenship skills they need to ensure that their voice is heard in democratic discussions on all levels.

"What will kids find to inspire them? Can they rise above their own self-interest? That's what patriotism is about."

What then are the characteristics of good citizenship education? One place to begin is the *National Standards for Civics and Government*, commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education and developed by the Center for Civic Education with the aid of numerous scholars and teachers. The standards provided the basis for the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress in civics. Also helpful are the *Curriculum Standards for Social Studies*, published by the National Council on the Social Studies (NCSS). Those documents, the work of Niemi and Junn, other research studies, and interviews with educators reveal some of the earmarks of good civics education:

- Students learn civics knowledge and skills at every grade level, with a special emphasis on instruction in the senior year of high school. Niemi and Junn's study found that students who have direct instruction in politics and government at age 17, when they are about to assume the rights and responsibilities of adults, are more likely to participate in political life through voting and other activities.
- Students learn the United States' founding documents, civic institutions, and political processes to lay the groundwork for understanding not only their own government but others, too. Also, as Niemi and Junn point out, comparing the U.S. system to others—for example, to parliamentary systems with coalition governments—provides important points of reference for a better understanding not only of how the United States functions but of why it was organized this way.
- Students learn to connect current events and controversies to those principles. Niemi and Junn point out that in many civics classes, controversial issues are avoided, promoting a false understanding of how the partisan political process really works. To do so, adds Harvard's Tony Wagner, does students a disservice: "We have to help kids understand what the struggle for democracy is all about—especially that it *is* a struggle. It's not something that is handed to you but something you have to fight for."
- Students have opportunities to practice democratic citizenship by taking part in programs such as mock trials and legislatures, school government, and conflict-resolution programs. These teach essential principles of justice such as protecting those with minority viewpoints, providing a safe environment for debate, and practicing shared authority. For example, a survey of South Dakota elementary school principals by researchers Jay Heath and Phil Vik of the University of South Dakota found that students who took part in school councils developed citizenship skills, including those associated with solving problems, sharing ideas, and managing projects.
- Students have opportunities to connect with the community by designing and taking part in service-learning projects. Numerous studies have documented how service learning enhances civic-mindedness. A 1997 review of service-learning programs led by Shepherd Zeldin of the University of Wisconsin–Madison found that the programs most successful at instilling an ethic of civic responsibility were those that let students design their activities, carry them out, analyze and reflect on them, and make changes according to their analysis. Also, students whose schools arranged such opportunities were twice as likely to volun-

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teer for community service, according to a 1999 survey of 6th- through 12th-grade students commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education.

• Students get to learn about local issues from local leaders. "Schools need to introduce kids to positive exemplars, especially on the local level," says Stanford's William Damon. "They need to see people who are taking civic leadership and responsibility, get to know them as flesh-and-blood human beings. Bring mayors or journalists into schools to discuss issues. Find points of contention—kids will get into that—and bring these issues to life. Then go back and connect it to history. Compare a tax fight in town with the ones that sparked the Revolutionary War." The Niemi and Junn analysis of the NAEP showed that students learn and understand more easily about local government than state or federal government—yet many civics courses ignore local issues altogether, missing an opportunity for engagement. They write: "When learning about their own towns or cities, for example, students can be shown the actual plot of land that the zoning board is ruling on. They often have direct access to local officials and . . . can certainly observe legislative bodies, including school boards."

Journalists have already taken to calling today's kids Generation 9-11 and Generation Why. Undoubtedly, the attacks of September 11—which killed more Americans than the Revolutionary War—will long be remembered by students. The jury is out on whether that leads to some profound change in how this generation views citizenship, says Damon. "What will kids find to inspire them? Can they rise above their own self-interest? That's what patriotism is about. You are willing to make sacrifices for the community. It's not just about waving the flag."

It will be up to adults, including those in schools, to make sure that the Pledge of Allegiance and the national anthem are just the beginning of such thoughtful assessment and not a hollow end in themselves. ■

interview

Making Global Connections

The 2001 National Teacher of the Year talks about teaching Arabic and the need for more world history, geography, and languages in schools

After September 11, numerous education commentators called on schools to provide more instruction in world history, geography, and languages, especially Arabic. Michele Forman began doing so years ago at Middlebury Union High School in Vermont, where she teaches social studies. Forman, a former Peace Corps volunteer in Nepal, started the school's Arabic program in 1997. Last April, she was named 2001 National Teacher of the Year in a White House ceremony. She spoke recently with HEL *about her efforts to help her students better understand the world and their place in it.*

How did you come to start the Arabic program at your school?

As I studied the Indian Ocean trade network and other topics, I became intrigued with the Arab world and the spread of Islam. I began studying the language at Ohio State University [through the National Endowment for the Humanities] one summer and fell in love with it. The next summer, I took part in a nine-week immersion program at Middlebury (VT) College. When I began teaching phrases and greetings in some of my classes, students were very interested and asked me to teach them more. So we began meeting two mornings a week before school. I was overwhelmed by the response. We've had about 20 students each year. I returned to the immersion program for two more summers, got grants to buy materials and books, purchased an interactive computer program and got permission to use it in the language lab.

Why do you think the students were so interested?

Part of it certainly was the exotic nature of the language. To be able to go down the halls and greet each other in Arabic had a certain panache. But they also came to understand how important this language is. There are a billion Arab speakers in the world. Once the program began, students became close and it was fun for them. Since it was a voluntary activity, they were also motivated to learn the language. I've been thrilled to watch at least two students that I know of go on to major in Middle Eastern studies [in college]. Maybe they would have found Arabic anyway, but clearly this gave them a head start.

Why is it important for students to study other cultures?

We are all citizens of one world. The world is too small to ignore that. It does not mean that there isn't anything unique about being American or French or Ghanaian or Israeli. But it does mean we have to recognize that we have far more in common and more connections than we ever have before. We have borrowed and profited so much from one another, and our students must learn this. When we study U.S. history, we recognize that it is more than the history of Massachusetts plus the histories of Michigan, Cali-

World on the Web

What do K–12 textbooks have to say about the history of terrorism, Central Asian politics, Islamic fundamentalism, the effects of anthrax? Not much. So since September 11, the Internet has become an important source of up-to-date information and lesson plans for many teachers. As Mary Mason, assistant principal for instruction at Houston County High School in Warner Robins, GA, notes: "Even five years ago, we wouldn't have had access to resources we now have. Now it's right at our fingertips. We've been trying to get teachers to use the Web more, and this provides the ideal reason to do so because a lot of information they need isn't available in textbooks." Here is a sample of some helpful sites compiled by *HEL*.

CNN FYI. Lesson plans from Cable News Network on the Afghanistan campaign, the anthrax scare, building alliances, and a host of other current events.
http://fyi.cnn.com/fyi

Choices for the 21st Century. Curriculum material and professional development resources for high school teachers on a range of foreign policy issues. Offered by the Thomas J. Watson Jr. Institute for International Studies at Brown University. **www.choices.edu/Sept11/top.html**

CSPAN Classroom. Multimedia resources on the role of public servants in response to September 11, cultural misunderstandings, military and diplomatic options, etc.
www.cspan.org/classroom/

Learning About Anthrax. ERIC database page with numerous links to articles and websites about the bacterium that causes anthrax and bacteria generally, antibiotics, the history of the disease, and more.
www.ericse.org/anthrax.html

New York Times Learning Network. Lesson plans, archives, daily updates, and quizzes for all grades, offered in conjunction with the Bank Street College of Education.
www.nytimes.com/learning/general/specials/terrorism/

100 Questions and Answers About Arab Americans. Assembled by the *Detroit Free Press* for journalists, but good for students, too. Dispels stereotypes.
www.freep.com/jobspage/arabs/index.htm

PBS. A variety of lesson plans and units for various grade levels (K–12). Topics include "Afghanistan Today," "Taming Terrorism," and "A World at Peace."
www.pbs.org/americaresponds/educators.html

Teaching Tolerance. The Southern Poverty Law Center's clearinghouse of information about antibias programs and activities being implemented in schools across the country.
www.tolerance.org/teach/index.jsp

Teachable Moments. The National Council for the Social Studies site includes lesson plans and a discussion forum for teachers. **www.socialstudies.org/resources/moments/**

United Nations CyberSchoolBus. Lesson plans on many relevant issues, including peace education, human rights, statistical data for member nations, etc.
www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus/index.html

fornia, Texas, Vermont, etc. The interconnectedness is important.

Likewise, we need to recognize that world history is far greater than the history of nation-states alone. Otherwise we miss the global connections. Studying other cultures helps us understand our own role in the world so we better understand ourselves as Americans. I'd like to see more history taught and I'd also like to see more attention paid to languages. Languages open doors to other cultures in a way that allows us to build respect and to conceptualize things differently. They are essential, and just because English has in many ways become a global language doesn't excuse us from learning other languages.

As a social studies teacher, how would you suggest we remedy the lack of civic involvement by young people?

There are many contributing factors to why people in general, not just kids, aren't as involved as they should be. Cynicism comes from different places—for example, from politicians acting in ways that are detrimental to the common good or for self-gain. Students need to see models of integrity in politics. I celebrated when [U.S. Senator] Jim Jeffords from Vermont made an ethical decision to leave the Republican Party. That provided my students with a model of someone making a thoughtful, conscientious decision and being willing to pay the consequences. That's not to say you have to bleed to be great, but you have to act ethically on behalf of the common good. That's what excites kids about politics. The job of the teacher is to instigate the kind of inquiry that will lead students to think deeply about what is good in our country. It's important for high school students to develop a critical faculty, to assess what it is they're told, what they read and hear. That's the very root of democracy.

How did your experiences growing up in the South affect you as a historian?

I grew up in Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia in a working-class family. The civil rights movement happened all around me and made a deep impression. It helped me develop a sense of justice and to define what it is to be American. I became idealistic because my models were people like Fannie Lou Hamer, people fighting for justice and for what was right. History is part of who we are. It's the lens through which we try to make sense of what's happening now. As one of Faulkner's characters [Gavin Stevens] says, "The past is never dead. It's not even past."

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Missing persons

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work and strengthen its effect.

Schools and admissions officers must also counsel families. Excellent counseling may help students with their plans and documents, but without parents' involvement in the essay process, an essential resource is lost. Even without detailed knowledge of the application process, without experience, even without English, parents are still an indispensable resource. Why are parents and English teachers more important to the application essay than well-trained and knowledgeable guidance personnel? What seems to be shared among those who are called on to help students is not a vast knowledge of the admissions world, but a first-hand connection to and broad knowledge of the student.

Such advisors provide the element essential to personal narrative, one that adolescent writers are just learning: reflective distance. Still enmeshed in being a high schooler, a student is hard pressed to determine exactly what it is that has shaped and influenced her. But the adult who knows her well has useful information. Adults already know that memory is reconstructive. Meaning changes: the first two-wheeler, the unsuccessful audition, the favorite pastime can be clearer to the invested observer than to the youthful participant. Parents who cannot tell their children how FAFSA's are evaluated or whether a combined SAT of 1400 is good enough for an applicant to Tufts can talk about the applicant, her life, and her experiences.

Where parents are silenced by unfamiliarity with the process or a sense of exclusion, their absence can be devastating. Students who must turn to English teachers or friends for this close relationship settle for a humble slice of information. (Friends, in particular, are unlikely to offer well-grounded guidance; their advice in qualitative portions of my survey was remarkably ill-considered.) Where parent-child discourse doesn't happen, others who know the student well clearly are called on to fill the gap. But where parents don't believe they have useful help to offer (often the same settings where counselors and teachers are overburdened), young writers will find their essays an even greater challenge.

The haunting number is the 3.2 vs. 2.2 helpers. Who was that missing person for students of color? If it was the parent, it is a critical absence, one that no external guides or an excellent website can replace. Of course, the journey toward higher education is different and difficult for every teenager. But without parents as the copilots, the river has one more shoal on which hopes can run aground. □

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For Further Information

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new and noteworthy

Research Deflates Charges of Grade Inflation

Despite the common belief that teachers have gone soft and grades don't mean what they used to, a recently released study has found just the opposite—at least when it comes to math. In a report published by the RAND Corporation, "Changes in High School Grading Standards in Mathematics, 1982–1992," Harvard Graduate School of Education professor Daniel Koretz and co-researcher Mark Berends indicate that "grade inflation"—the raising over time of grades that students receive for a certain level of achievement—may not pose the threat to high standards that critics believe it does.

Comparing the grade point averages of nearly 24,000 high school seniors in 1982 and 1992, Koretz and Berends found "only modest changes" in overall GPA distribution. The average GPA rose slightly, from 2.56 to 2.63, and there were slightly higher percentages of grades B- or better for the later cohort. But when the researchers took students' proficiency (as demonstrated by achievement tests) into account, they found that grades in math actually deflated over the 10-year period. (No such comparisons were possible in the other subject areas because of the lack of "equitable tests" in those subjects, the researchers said.)

Koretz and Berends offer several explanations for the inconsistency between their findings and the reports of grade inflation heard from college admissions officers, who often complain that they have difficulty differentiating among applicants who are all "straight-A" students. The researchers say that significant grade inflation may in fact be occurring, but did not over the decade they studied. However, they also say that grade inflation in certain schools, such as those serving children from high-income families, may skew perceptions about the grades of all students. A third possibility is that the notion that standards were tougher in the past may be a myth.

"There are many pieces to this puzzle, and the one we looked at doesn't show grade inflation," Koretz says. "It's possible that there really hasn't been as much grade inflation over the long term as people think."

For further information: D. Koretz and M. Berends. Changes in High School Grading Standards in Mathematics, 1982–1992. *Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001. 310-451-7002; fax: 310-451-6915. www.rand.org*

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Missing Persons

The application essay is a key part of the college admissions process, but poor and minority students get a lot less help in writing it both at school and at home

By Sarah Myers McGinty

At the beginning of their study of affirmative action and the practice of college admission, William G. Bowen and Derek Bok evoke Mark Twain's image of the mighty river featured in *Life on the Mississippi* as a metaphor for the process of education, a process that is meant to bring the flow of talent into the larger sea of opportunity, employment, and success. Bowen and Bok's river is a suitable metaphor for the college admissions process as well, a journey with its own set of shoals, surprises, and challenges. Among those challenges is that 8 ½" x 11" blank space provided for the application essay or personal statement.

The application essay has been a part of college admissions since the explosion of college enrollment after World War II, evolving from direct queries like "Why in particular do you wish to attend Bates?" to more eccentric requests like "What is your favorite food?" (Princeton University) or "You have just published your 300-page autobiography. Please submit page 217" (University of Pennsylvania). Although not every college requires an application essay, narrative prose figures into the admissions process at many schools. The evaluation of the essay may contribute to how a college differentiates among its top applicants. Or it may determine whether a borderline candidate has the necessary basic skills. Colleges use essays for different purposes, but essays matter at large, small, public, private, selective, and nonselective schools.

Admissions counselors estimated that students spent about four hours writing application essays—far less time than students said they worked.

How do high school students experience this assignment? Do they, their teachers, and their counselors see the essay in the same way as admissions officers? Those were some of the questions I began researching in 1998, when I completed a pilot study designed to compare perceptions of the application essay. I readdressed some of the same issues in 2000–2001, looking to compare the application process of middle-class high school seniors with that of less advantaged students, that is, students whose guidance counselors serve several hundred seniors, whose parents did not attend college, whose first language is not English, or whose families are of low socioeconomic status (SES).

While more than 60 percent of high school seniors in this country go on to college, where they go and how they get there is different for each applicant, often depending on SES. Studies like UCLA researcher Patricia McDonough's *Choosing Colleges: How Social Class and Schools Structure Opportunity* highlight the special challenges faced by economically disadvantaged students. I wondered, does the application essay pose additional obstacles for those applicants? My year-long solo project could not produce a comprehensive body of data on these topics. But in researching how all kinds of students prepare applications and how colleges read their essays, my most interesting finding was about who helps.

In every group and in every school, parent involvement exceeded that of any other group. Of the 173 middle-class students interviewed, 70 percent cited parents as one of the top three sources of help, followed by English teachers (60%) and school guidance counselors (58%). In my study focusing more on large public high schools, 146 lower-SES seniors cited parents (32%) and English teachers (24%) as their main helpers. Only 3 percent identified guidance counselors as a primary source of help, while 11 percent said they wrote their essays with no help at all. (Student writers overestimated the importance of the essay, devoting twice as many hours to writing their essays as admissions counselors thought.)

Students from high schools with high rates of post-graduation education, white students, students whose parents completed more than a high school education, and students who learned English as their first language were more likely to record parents as helpers in the essay process. Students of color listed parents as their primary source of help in 38 percent of their responses, compared with 73 percent of white students. The average number of helpers for students of color was 2.2; for white students, 3.2. At the high school whose students represented the lowest SES in my study, parents were primary advisors 18 percent of the time, compared with 54 percent at a suburban public high school and 80 percent at a private preparatory school.

Another significant finding was that English teachers, both in and out of class, helped applicants more than did school counselors. All teachers, but English teachers in particular, appear to devote substantial time and unacknowledged, unpaid effort to their students' college applications. College admissions representatives who travel to high schools might spend their time talking to English teachers. Dialogue between admissions officers and teachers—and more acknowledgment of the teachers' role—would dignify their

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